Hungarian University of Fine Arts Doctoral School

A Paraphrase of Craft

DLA thesis

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CONTENT

Part 3.: Making and Thinking

Foreword

"How We Live and How We Might Live"[1]

The moment I realized that craft is the core notion of my interests—providing as a kind of a "spine" to all my doings—was while I was reading William Morris's book *News from Nowhere*[2] in an unlikely setting: Cairo, Egypt, in 2007[3]. The novel, written in 1890, depicts a future society approximately 120 years after Morris's time, which is more or less the present I am writing from. This new world is simple, balanced, and happy: there are no institutions such as banks, schools, or courts, nor even social constructs like marriage or class. People live in harmony with nature and its rhythms; art is part of everyday life, and work is a form of pleasure. According to the indications given in the book, the way this society came into being is that the people imagined and developed it completely anew after the "big change", after some horrified and devastating event that erased everything that existed until then. Nobody (apart from a very old man) knows what society looked like before the "big change". In other words, they don't remember the past. The reader of the novel does.

The kind of art and artists I have always been interested in remember the past and try to comprehend it in order to understand how we live and will live in the future. The art discussions I was surrounded by from early on[4] were influenced both by the Western art canon and effects of socialist ideology from the past—or, better to say, its aftermath in the post-socialist region undergoing transition. And so, I came to Morris because I was interested in the period in which he was active, seeking to learn more about the correlation between art and early socialist ideas. I wanted to understand how artists originally reacted to the emergence of certain ideological conceptions—their origins and earliest

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[1] The title refers to William Morris's lecture, first delivered in London in 1884 and later published in *Commonweal* (1887). In it, Morris critiques contemporary society, articulating his vision of a more just society and his belief in the transformative power of imagination and collective action.

[2] William Morris. *News from Nowhere; or, An Epoch of Rest: Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance.* First published in the Commonweal, in 1890.

[3] It was during an art residency at CIC (Contemporary Image Collective) Cairo, Egypt.

[4] growing up in Novi Sad, former Yugoslavia.

forms—that would later come to shape in various ways during the twentieth century and influence our present. Why is the (socialist) heritage of Eastern Europe so contradictory, and how does it connect to the rest of Europe and the world?

I was interested in Morris because of the combination of various aspects of his doings. He was a poet, artist, writer, designer, entrepreneur and socialist activist. In today's terms, we might call him a "socially engaged" or "multimedia" artist, but actually, he was much more than that. He might not have been a philosopher, but for me, the way he approached craft was philosophical. After reading William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, I began to address the notion of craft as a philosophical frame for my art practice. I found that it brings together all my seemingly diverse interests—those related to the intersection of art, society, and design. My art production is not particularly "crafty" in the colloquial sense, but my practice does incorporate certain methods and values associated with craft. It is rooted in collaboration, engages carefully with materials, and considers its purpose within society.

I began the DLA program back in 2010, when I was still living in Budapest. At that time, I felt that the notion of craft was understudied—particularly from the perspective of the local independent art scene in Budapest, which I was primarily engaged with. In the past ten—or slightly more—years, we have witnessed a rapid growth in interest in craft. In fact, craft has become something of a buzzword, an imperative, a marker of "quality," and a "promise" of a good life. Much of this is tied to a simplistic, constrained, or even misleading approach to craft—one that fails to acknowledge the complexity of the contemporary world. The label "craft" (as in craft beer, craft living, etc.) is often used for marketing purposes—as a kind of salvation or escape from the alienating aspects of today's technocratic way of life—and it tends to serve only the privileged. That said, there has also been a rise in serious craft scholarship. Over the past ten to fifteen years, many excellent books have been written on the subject, which has validated and supported my ongoing interest in this field. I understand craft as a rich and potent notion—one of the most important when thinking about humanity and what it means to be human. It is not only relevant but essential to explore craft more deeply in a world shaped predominantly by technology and capital.

This DLA thesis is not strictly about craft. Rather, it brings together various aspects connected to it—elements that, for me, come together to form a coherent picture. The term "craft" itself also points toward other aspects that may not be addressed here, or at least not in detail. Craft can mean quite different things to different people and hold various places in their lives.

That is why I chose the title *A Paraphrase of Craft*. It represents one possible approach to thinking about what craft is. But where the topic actually comes from is a broader reflection on the questions: *What is art? How to make Art? And most importantly—what kind of art?* With this thesis I present a patchwork of fragments that are important for me, that are part of my interests and viewpoints. I do not consider this thesis to be a closed or comprehensive body of research, but rather a kind of framework or map for my artistic observations. The structure of the thesis (together with the masterworks) follows and presents my own trajectory of thinking and learning about craft. It is structured in three main parts entitled: Craft is a word to start an argument with, Re-reading Arts & Crafts and Making and Thinking. Writing this thesis in Hungarian language would not have been possible in the same way, as many of the key terms I use in English do not exist in the equivalent form, or carry the same connotations, in Hungarian.

As the structure of this thesis suggests, I arrived at the topic of craft with a detour. From the beginning, I was interested in how art embodies social awareness, and in the kinds of (active) roles it takes on in its attempts not only to exist and survive within society, but also to speak about it. Social consciousness and commentary became dominant themes in contemporary art discourse I experienced during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This discourse included ethically grounded critical practices and a move away from exclusive notions of individual artistic authorship.

My initial DLA research topic was titled "Temporary Geographies." It was oriented toward understanding my formative experiences in art and mapping my place within it. That place was—and still is—burdend and shaped by ideological, political, and cultural transformations. Growing up in Yugoslavia, witnessing a disintegration of a country and

the destructive forces of a civil war, then studying in Budapest/Hungary, in the first half of 2000s I observed, in both contexts, how identities shift. I became interested in the viability and fragility of the symbols attached to those identities, visible in the material culture surrounding us. These symbols, signs, and forms are powerful—they penetrate deeply into both the consciousness and unconsciousness of people, shaping their mental landscapes. Alongside people's lives and identities, it is also material culture—and, as we are increasingly aware today, nature—that is damaged, broken, or sometimes reappropriated during times of social turmoil. The term *temporary* referred to a set of concepts or legacies that—for one reason or another—have changed or lost their credibility. The term *geographies* referred to places or units that have ceased to exist: ones that no longer appear on official maps but still exist in other, mainly psychological, realms. These are topographies where social changes have left both material and immaterial traces.

Both art and design manifest and epitomize the concerns outlined above. During periods of turbulence and instability—marked by the disappearance of contexts, countries, archives, and even people—there is rarely any explicit mention of craft, despite its quiet but continuous presence. In all the stories of identity, ideology, and their often monumental material traces, I have always admired craft for its overlooked position within dominant cultural narratives. It possesses a kind of omnipresent but subtle strength and has the unique ability to bridge the boundaries between high and low, private and public, amateur and professional domains. If we choose to "think through craft[5]," we could arrive at an alternative understanding of history: one concerned not with rupture and destruction, but with continuity, process, creation and nurturing.

Another important resource, and actually the first book that helped me deepen my understanding of craft, I discovered by chance: *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*[6] by Victor Papanek. Years later, after reading William Morris and conducting more purposeful research, I encountered the writings of Glenn Adamson,

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[5] Reference to the book: Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007). Adamson's book is a foundational text in contemporary craft theory.

[6] Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*, Toronto/New York/ London: Bantam Books, 1973.

whose work has been crucial to my study of the notion of craft. His books, *Thinking Through Craft* and *The Invention of Craft*, introduced a fresh academic approach to the subject.

Even though the discourse about craft has developed tremendously in recent years, I still think the topic is important to explore—arguably more so each day. Many current issues, especially climate change and extractivism, point to the importance of engaging with craft in all its complexity. The notion of craft offers a unique set of lenses for understanding the world and humanity's place within it. The quality of craft transcends temporal, political, religious, and social boundaries; it is a shared human capacity.

Part 1.

1.1: Introduction to the Thesis

Why Paraphrase Craft? What is Craft? Is Craft art?

"Craft is a word to start an argument with.[7]"

One might ask: what is *A Paraphrase of Craft*? Can craft, as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, even be paraphrased? And more fundamentally, what is *craft*?

There is no clean and stable, or universally accepted definition of craft. Surely, one can find many definitions of it, craft is an old term. While many definitions exist, they often diverge, reflecting various ways in which craft is understood, practiced, and valued across different cultures, communities and histories. Without specific context, the term craft can seem very vague too.

I chose the title *A Paraphrase of Craft* for this thesis deliberately, to emphasize the need to rethink what craft is, and the need to understand it and handle it in a different way than what the majority is accustomed to.[8] This thesis offers one possible approach to thinking about craft: it is an attempt to encircle its meaning and significance, arguing that society must adopt more nuanced understandings that transcend conventional hierarchies, and propose why it is vital to attune to the full potential of craft.

In this thesis, I approach the notion of craft primarily as a philosophical concept—one that relates to the fundamental questions about life, labor, ethics, knowledge, and existence.

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[7] David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968)

[8] Wikipedia entry on craft: "A craft is an occupation or trade requiring manual dexterity or artistic skill." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craft_(disambiguation)), and "A craft or trade is a pastime or an occupation that requires particular skills and knowledge of skilled work." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craft)

It summons together various aspects of craft that are traditionally often treated separately or viewed as separate entities. It is important to note that the perspectives and interpretations addressed here are unfortunately predominantly, or even exclusively, stemming from the Western cultural canon. For instance, the perception of craft as a specialized or niche practice largely emerged from the process of modernization that initially took place mainly in Western societies.

Craft offers a lens through which seemingly different activities can be understood in relation to one another. It can also provide a perspective for understanding culturally diverse contexts. There is a predominance of Western European discourse on craft available in English; consequently, the sources used in this dissertation are primarily in English, written from a Western cultural perspective and referencing system. This framing necessarily situates the discussion within a particular set of cultural assumptions, which is important to note here, as it, unfortunately, limits the scope of the thesis. At the same time, craft is a concept that may operate differently in non-Western contexts.

The intention of this thesis is not to oppose earlier understandings, but to understand, and to extend those fragmented views and bring us to a more universal understanding of craft, to its paraphrase.

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It seems that craft has existed since the first objects were made by humans, and it can be seen as an expression of what humans are, and as a marker of cultural identity. This thesis, however, is not intending to present a comprehensive history of craft.

When researching craft, one will immediately find that the biggest pivotal moment in the discourse on craft is the Industrial Revolution. It is considered that we are experiencing a constant decline of craft, threatened by “industry” and technological advances. Yet, as curator, historian, and writer on craft Glenn Adamson argues, “craft is itself a modern intervention. It is customary to speak of the century from 1750 to 1850 as the

time of the 'industrial revolution,' a phrase that conveys a sense of radical transformation. [...] Yet it is easy to overlook the fact that craft was taking shape at the same time."[9] By this, Adamson of course does not suggest that craft and the work of craftsmen did not exist before the Industrial Revolution, but rather that we cannot speak about craft as a separate sphere of activity before its modern redefinition.

In the Western culture, craft is often related to various hierarchies that structure fine art and design (and, for that matter, fashion, sculpture, material science, amateur practice, and other adjacent fields). In this thesis, I do not approach craft simply as an aspect of another practice, nor as a separate unit. Rather, I propose to understand craft as a notion related to the quality or mode of operation existing in multiple disciplines. Further, even though craft lies in the heart of the relationship between art, design and society, it is in fact present in many practices, and not only in the cultural ones, associated with aesthetics or museums. Craft is also connected to immaterial, or even to highly complex technological products. In fact, craft is connected not only to making (of objects) but to the processes of care, maintenance and repair too. And it can also be understood as a particular form of thinking.

Craft can be observed from many different points of views, such as industry, society, technology, creativity or economy... but it does not exist as an autonomous entity. As Glenn Adamson remarks in the *The Craft Reader*: "There is no autonomous, free-floating thing called craft, divorced from any particular practice."[10] At the same time Adamson writes, "Craft must indeed be seen autonomously, and in fact it is imperative to see it this way, because craft captures something essential about the world around us."[11] In recent history, craft has often been regarded as something that has lost its value and importance, confined to artisanal customs and traditions that appear static and unresponsive to the modern world. It was also often seen as intellectually inconvenient or insignificant and thus understood in pejorative terms. For example, craft is still often as-

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[9] Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), xiii.

[10] Glenn Adamson, ed., *The Craft Reader* (London: Berg Publishers, 2010), 335.

[11] Adamson, *The Craft Reader.*

sociated with the production of handmade objects deemed to hold little intellectual value—a misconception in several aspects. It is important to recognize that this commonly accepted "inferior" identity is not an inherent quality but a socially constructed perception. There is also a tendency, in recent years, to probe craft as a guarantee of something supposed to be supreme. There is some limited but noticeable spread of changes under way, considering craft in relation to alternative sets of social values in response to industrial production, global capitalism, and mass consumerism.

Finally, the mention of craft often brings up the question: Is craft a type of art? This is not a question I primarily address in this thesis.[12] Instead, the thesis moves between examples drawn from different disciplines precisely because craft is bridging them; for the purposes of this thesis, it is not necessary to establish a bigger distinction. Rather, the thesis aims to question whether contemporary understandings of craft can offer a new framework for rethinking general narratives, both within and beyond the artistic field.

[12] At the same time, I write this thesis as an artist within the DLA program at the University of Art, and as such, I am unavoidably bringing in a particular point of view. Nevertheless, the emphasis here is less on the discussion or analysis of specific artworks than on a reflection on the values of craft, which, I believe, are central to understanding how we make, think, and live today.

1.2: Origins of Craft

Etymology

In the English language the meaning of the word *craft* is extensive. It is difficult to find an equivalent word in other languages, although words derived from the same etymon are found in most Germanic tongues. Originally, *craft* referred to several notions such as mental or physical power, strength and skill. Over time, it became more associated with handmade work, practical skill in making things—particularly by hand—and with artisanal or technical expertise. As Glenn Adamson shows in *The Invention of Craft*, the term *craft* only acquired its contemporary connotations in the late nineteenth century.[13] At that time *crafts*—along with related terms such as *applied arts*, *decorative arts*, *industrial arts*, etc.—emerged as replacements for the older and increasingly obsolete category of the *mechanical arts*. These semantic shifts reflect broader cultural and institutional transformations, particularly the desire to distinguish certain forms of manual skill from both industrial labor and so-called *fine art*.

Contemporary use of the word *craft* in English predominantly refers to handmade objects or products—such as ceramics, woodworking, or textiles, a profession or trade (e.g., "the craft of writing"), or to certain types of vehicles (e.g., "aircraft", "watercraft"). But the origins of the word and the development of its meaning reveal us the enormous scope of the connotations of craft, connected to both physical and mental abilities, and a specific kind of power that transcends[14] both.

The ultimate etymology of the word *craft* is uncertain. Its origins are to be found in Old English *cræft* (West Saxon, Northumbrian), *-creft* (Kentish), referring to "power, physical strength, might". The earliest recorded example of the use of the word craft dates from the year 897: *Se cræft þæs lareowdomes biÞ cræft ealra cræfta* [This craft of

[13] Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

[14] Maybe it is no coincidence that the term 'witchcraft' is containing *craft* in it, relating craft to supernatural and magic.

learning is the craft of all crafts][15]. The meaning of the Proto-Germanic **krab-/*kraf-* (source also of Old Frisian *kreft*, Old High German *chraft*, German *Kraft* meaning "strength, skill, force, power;" Old Norse *kraptr* "strength, virtue") expanded in Old English to include "skill, dexterity; art, science, talent" (via a notion of "mental power"), which led to the meaning "trade, handicraft, employment requiring special skill or dexterity."[16]

In ancient Greek philosophy, the term *techne* (Greek: τέχνη, romanized: téchnē) encompassed the ideas of craft, art, and skill. It was a philosophical concept referring to making and doing—the capacity to make or do something directed toward a specific goal or production. Studying the understanding of *techne* in classical philosophical texts reveals how ancient thinkers understood the connection between knowledge and doing—a connection that still shapes how we view science, ethics, art, craft and technology. While Socrates and Plato often used *epistēmē* (knowledge or theoretical understanding) and *techne* somewhat interchangeably, Aristotle drew a clearer distinction between the two. In his classification, *epistēmē* is aligned with abstract, theoretical understanding, while *techne* belongs to the domain of productive and practical knowledge. Aristotle's conceptual division laid the groundwork for a lasting hierarchy in Western thought, where intellectual activity was separated from and positioned above manual labor. For Stoics, however, craft isn't just about object-making—it's a model for living well. Their fusion of ethics and skill—of moral purpose embedded in making—is an idea that, as we will see, resonated centuries later in the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, which similarly argued that craft could serve as a vehicle for meaningful living.

There is no word for *craft* in Latin and the closest corresponding terms depend on the particular nuance or meaning intended. Words such as ars (art, skill), opus (work, labor), fabrica (workshop or craftsmanship), and peritia (expertise, experience) each reflect cer-

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[15] Oxford English Dictionary online (Accessed July 2025)

[16] Examples: 1386: *...of his craft he was a carpenter* [he was a carpenter by trade]. Also "something built or made" 1440: *For your entente I shall a craft* devise [For your purpose I shall invent a 'thing'], even "a work or product of art" 1325: *þat ilk crafte he carf with his hondes* [the same 'piece' that he carved with his hands]. However, the word was still used for "might, power" in Middle English, 1250: *Ðurȝ godes bode and godes craft* [*through God's command and God's power*].

tain aspects of what is commonly understood as craft. Interestingly, in English, the word *craft* predates the word *art* by approximately one to two centuries. That said, *art*, via Latin (Latin *ars*), has older Indo-European roots than *craft* , and therefore it has an older written lineage in classical texts. Latin *ars* (art, skill) goes back to Proto-Indo-European root *ar*- meaning "to fit, join, assemble".

Prior to the Norman Conquest of 1066, Old English lacked a direct equivalent to the Latin-derived *art*. Instead, related concepts were transmitted through native terms such as *crœft*, which included ideas of strength, skill, and knowledge. The word *art* entered the English language after the Norman Conquest through Old French, which had borrowed the term from Latin. This linguistic history underscores the gradual divergence between the concepts of art and craft in Western cultures.

Divergence Between Craft and Art

While craft and art share overlapping origins and material practices, their trajectories have gradually diverged in response to shifting sociological, economic, and political conditions. Over time, the two became associated with distinct cultural roles and institutional affiliations. Given their interconnection, why is the separation between craft and art so frequently emphasised? When did this divide emerge, and why did it become so significant? More critically, at what point did art become privileged, more important, over what came to be regarded as the “mere” craft?

Somewhere in history—perhaps more than once—a rupture occurred which resulted in the separation between (fine) art and craft(manship) and between artists and artisans. This rupture formed understanding in which art was elevated above craft. But how might the history of ideas and the structure of fine art institutions appear if we did not presume the inevitable triumph of art over craft, the artist over the artisan? How would society function if this distinction was not enforced?

In *The Invention of Craft*[17], Glenn Adamson argues that the separation between art and craft is a habit that originates in the twentieth century, rooted in the post-1945 period. He links this separation to the diverse economic viability of art and craft, particularly as shaped by museum representation. Craft, perceived as less economically valuable and less suitable for institutional collecting, was systematically excluded from mainstream narratives and exhibition and museum spaces.

Other scholars have also addressed the persistent dichotomy between craft and art. In *The Invention of Art*[18], Larry Shiner argues that this divergence emerged in the Renaissance and culminated in a formal institutional separation during the eighteenth century. He calls for a critical reconsideration of this historical development, arguing that the distinctions drawn between craft and art emerged from significant social transformations in Europe during the long eighteenth century. According to Shiner, the modern concepts, practices, and institutions of "fine art"—defined as a distinct and superior category above craft, encompassing applied arts, decorative arts, and design—were fully established by the early nineteenth century. Shiner further links the emergence of art as a separate and elevated sphere to the rise of capitalist society. As he writes:

> "My argument concerns not simply the classificatory category, "fine art," but the entire social and cultural complex of high art, thus treating the establishment of the modern idea of art as part of a larger social and cultural break."[19]

He emphasizes the role of powerful social and economic factors—such as the rise of the market economy and the growth of the middle class—in shaping the modern understanding of art and, consequently, its separation from craft. These developments, which formed what Shiner terms the "cultural system of art," were deeply entangled with existing hierarchies of race, class, and gender. It is striking that art continues to be taught and interpreted largely through the lens of the modern cultural system and its embedded hierarchies. What might our understanding of art look like if it were no longer separated

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[17] Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

[18] Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

[19] Larry Shiner, *Books*, LarryShiner.com, accessed July 2025, https://www.larryshiner.com/books

from craft? And is it possible to reimagine that relationship today? Further, would reimagining this relationship mean reimagining the society basically?

Since the late nineteenth century, various thinkers have critically addressed the division between craft and art. Among them, William Morris was a pioneering voice who rejected the conviction that craft and art were inherently separate. This belief underpinned his strong critique of the Industrial Revolution, which he saw as a driving force behind the rupture between the two domains. For Morris, industrialization not only deepened the divide between craft and art but also degraded both people and objects.

Beyond economic and social factors, the split between craft and art also stems from a long-standing divide between making and thinking, one that predates industrialization. This divide assumes that ideas exist apart from making, and that creativity is purely intellectual rather than rooted in material knowledge and embodied skill, thus devaluing the tacit knowledge inherent in craft. Whether this division is mainly a feature of post–mid-twentieth-century Western culture, or has deeper historical roots, remains open to debate. More important, however, is the question of how this division can be overcome. This thesis suggests that the answer lies in a reparaphrasing of craft.

One of the most significant moments in the separation of craft from art came in the early twentieth century. With Marcel Duchamp's introduction of the readymade in 1913, a radical question emerged: Does art need craft at all? From then on, choosing and naming could substitute for making, and artistic authorship no longer seemed to depend on technical skill or manual labor. After Duchamp, many came to view craft not as the foundation of artistic practice but as one medium among others—an option rather than a necessity. Since the readymade, there has been much intellectual confusion about what constitutes skill and craft in art. Another aspect of Duchamp's influence lies in his separation of artistic work from the conventional signs of artistic authorship, opening the artwork to the results of heteronomous labour (opposed to autonomous, 'artistic' labour). As John Roberts observes, "The split between artistic labour and the conventional craft-based signs of authorship which follows from this split, necessarily links

artistic skill in late capitalist culture to a conception of artistic labour as immaterial production."[20]

Although perhaps not his explicit intention, Clement Greenberg's critical writings may have contributed to the dismissal of the notion of craft within modernist art discourse. His influential 1939 essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*[21] set up a stark divide between avant-garde art—framed as innovative, intellectually rigorous, and culturally progressive—and kitsch, linked to mass production, sentimentality, and cultural inferiority. While Greenberg never directly addressed craft, the binary he established shaped theoretical, critical, and institutional approaches that helped consign it in the outdated category of the decorative arts. Craft, seen as intellectually unsophisticated, was pushed to the margins of artistic discourse. This marginalization was further reinforced in the post–1945 art system that upheld that hierarchy. Greenberg was, in part, reacting to the mass-produced goods dominating consumer culture—the kind of objects William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement had already anticipated and harshly criticized many decades earlier. Morris had warned of the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and the surge of cheaply manufactured goods, arguing that they led not only to a decline in aesthetic standards (that is, to *kitsch*) but also to the erosion of the social and ethical value of making. In this way, Greenberg's theory—though focused on the critical depth and autonomy of art, and on criticizing popular entertainment and mass-produced objects that served ideological ends—indirectly contributed to the marginalization of the notion of craft in the following period.

In *The Culture of Craft*[22], published in 1997, Peter Dormer poses a provocative question: Why is craft considered intellectually inconvenient in modern and contemporary art? He critiques the dominant explanation in modern art theory that conceptual under-

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[20] John Roberts, The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade (London: Verso, 2007), 3.

[21] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 3–21, accessed July 2025, https://monoskop.org/images/1/12/Greenberg_Clement_Art_and_Culture_Critical_Essays_1965.pdf

[22] Peter Dormer, ed. *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)

standing takes precedence over execution, and that physical making is secondary to artistic value. This perspective implies that making something well does not require intellectual rigor. Dormer challenges this perspective by asking why, in a discourse shaped by abstract ideas and concepts, the embodied intelligence characteristic of craft is often dismissed as inconvenient.

Unlike conceptualism, which elevates idea over execution, and that prefers verbal articulation, craft asserts an alternative mode of intelligence—one that is embodied, material, often unspoken and grounded in the act of making. Yet this embodied nature does not imply anti-intellectualism. On the contrary, when craft is properly understood, it reveals a form of immaterial or reflective thinking, that may or may not operate through the physical act of making. This perspective was already articulated by John Ruskin, who viewed craft not merely as skilled labor but as a site of moral and intellectual engagement. In this light, craft can be seen not as inferior to conceptual art, but as a carrier of a different kind of knowledge, rooted in common experience, physicality, and ethical practice.

A theoretical discourse on craft emerged not only from outside but also from within the craft community itself. One of the most influential contributors was David Pye—a British woodworker, teacher, and author active primarily during the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than focusing on the historical divergence between craft and art, Pye dealt with the internal logic and complexity of craft. He provided a technical and practice-based counter-argument to dominant views that framed craft as anti-intellectual. Crucially, he does not theorize about craft from a distance but instead from within making itself. His primary concern lies in another important divide, perhaps even more significant than that between craft and art: the distinction between craft and industry. Through his writing, Pye critically undermined the assumed binary that separates these domains.

Pye was critical of the terms “craft” and “craftsmanship,” which he considered too vague, idealized, or unscientific for analytical purposes. He argued that the word "craft" often carries a romanticized connotation, evoking images of pre-industrial, hand-made

objects carrying mystical qualities, a statement many would agree with. Pye was keen to demystify this romanticism and to understand how things are made. In response, he coined the term “the workmanship of risk23” to more accurately describe forms of making in which the outcome is not predetermined and depends on the maker’s skill at the moment of execution. Pye distinguished between “the workmanship of risk” and “the workmanship of certainty,” a dichotomy that parallels the broader opposition between craft and industrial production. Rather than treating craft and industry as mutually exclusive, he argued that all forms of making, from the artisan’s workshop to the factory setting, exist on a spectrum between risk and certainty, rather than in fixed categories. In doing so, Pye challenged the conventional binary that separates skilled, creative labor from mechanized, industrial work. Importantly, Pye’s writing undermines the assumption that craftsmanship is inherently opposed to industry. In his essay “Critique of the 'On the Nature of Gothic’,”[24] Pye engages critically with John Ruskin’s foundational text of the craft revival. He questions Ruskin’s idealization of the Gothic artisan and the moral purity attributed to pre-industrial craft, offering instead a more pragmatic, less romanticized account of making. While Ruskin’s writings are today, rightly, often read with critical distance, they do nonetheless foreshadow certain contemporary perspectives on hybrid or “post-craft” practices—an idea that Pye also helped to advance.

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Despite these dichotomies that persist, manual labor, cognitive reflection, and emotional or symbolic expression have historically evolved together as interconnected aspects of human creativity, cognition and activity. In early human societies, making was not merely functional; it was thoughtful and often charged with symbolic or spiritual meaning.

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[23] David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968)

[24] David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), “A Critique of the ‘On the Nature of Gothic.’”

1.3: Craft under Disguise

"Craft is a very important name.[25]"

The relationship between craft and art, design, and work is primeval, and has been developing since human activity is known.The boundaries we now perceive between these categories are not fixed or inherent, but are shaped by historical and cultural narratives. Although many theoretical frameworks and terminologies have attempted to define and classify them, clear distinctions remain elusive. Within these classificatory systems, craft is often the most obscured. It is frequently relegated to applied arts, decorative arts, design, or manual labor. Still, craft endures not as a peripheral activity but as an embedded, often invisible thread that runs through various forms of practice.

Craft often appears in disguise, without being explicitly named or fully understood. However, it is to be found across many practices, even when it is not acknowledged or is concealed. Its criteria, or, let's call it—ethos, can continue to guide, even when the result appears mass-produced, modern, is immaterial or categorized as art.

The ethos of craft is a human-scaled approach to making, rooted in respect for materials, and the natural environment. It seeks balance between progress and preservation, between the human and non-human creatures and the technological, and between individual and collective creativity and responsibility. Many craft theorists include a commitment to doing things well for their own sake. Although inherent in the work of craftsmen, this is a problematic principle, as doing things well for their own sake is not sufficient on its own: as it can be put to a "good or bad end." The ethos of craft, therefore, must also involve an awareness of consequence.[26]

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[25] Paul Greenhalgh, "The History of Craft," in *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 46.

[26] This explanation may not be sufficient for the reader. The question of the ethos of craft is a philosophical question, and therefore a larger explanation extends the scope of this thesis.

Examining terminology can serve as a means of tracking the emergence of ideas and classifications. The vocabulary related to craft has shifted over time and often appears in dichotomous formulations. As noted earlier in the text, these divisions can be traced through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, back to the medieval period, and, according to some, as far as antiquity.

In classical and medieval philosophy, the mechanical arts were distinguished from the liberal arts. The Latin term artes mechanicae referred broadly to practical, manual, and technical skills—crafts and techniques using machines and tools or grounded in applied knowledge—typically associated with manual labor and skilled trades. In contrast, the artes liberales encompassed intellectual and theoretical disciplines. While the mechanical arts once covered hands-on skills and practical knowledge, the term gradually gave way to categories such as the applied sciences, engineering, and technology. Nevertheless, this divide remains a useful framework for analyzing the relationship and hierarchy between technical expertise and theoretical knowledge.

The liberal arts took the term art in the sense of a learned skill rather than specifically the fine arts. It originally referred to subjects such as grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, which were considered suitable for free (liber) men to study. In early universities, the mechanical arts were often excluded from formal academic study, yet they remained critical to industrial and technological development.

Another important distinction is the relationship between the decorative and fine arts. The scope of the decorative arts was held to be conceiving and manufacturing/producing objects that were both beautiful and functional, rather than primarily stimulating the intellect, as the fine arts were thought to do. The term decorative arts largely overlaps with applied arts. There has always been decoration. Forms of decorative art have existed in all civilizations.[27] Although the term itself emerged only in the late eighteenth and

[27] The larger question of decoration (and, for that matter, ornamentation) is beyond the scope of this thesis, yet it remains very important for understanding craft. Ornaments are among the earliest visible traces of human existence. Ornamentation demonstrates a capacity to express ideas through symbols, transforming thought into a communicable form rather than leaving it as mere mental processing.
See more in: Part 3. / Tools.

nineteenth centuries, the distinction from fine arts can already be traced back to the Renaissance in the West. Today, both decorative and applied arts are often placed under the umbrella of design, a category that gained recognition as a distinct field in the late nineteenth century. Paul Greenhalgh discusses this complex classification in relation to craft in *The History of Craft*. He notes that "most written histories of design place the decorative arts within its empire, yet clearly these are at the heart of the history of craft also.[28]" He further argues that "decorative arts were an amorphous collection of practices fashioned from the disenfranchised when the original concept of fine art was formed in the eighteenth century.[29]" More precisely, he observes that "the term took on a particular set of meanings in Europe in the later eighteenth century that have to do with the consolidation of a hierarchical classification system within European visual art.[30]"

Although largely obsolete today, the term "decorative arts" retains importance in museum collections and historical scholarship. The decorative arts gained institutional validation through the founding of museums and exhibitions devoted to them. Perhaps the most important example is the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which originated from the Great Exhibition of 1851 and opened in 1852 under the name Museum of Manufactures. Its mission today is to "is to be recognised as the world's leading museum of art, design and performance, and to enrich people's lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience.[31]", as stated on their website. Strikingly, amid this terminological abundance, the term "craft" persisted, and began to belong instead to different registers: in the domains of philosophical language, or even ideology[32], as a notion with a complex meaning.

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[28] Greenhalgh, The History of Craft, 40.

[29] Greenhalgh, The History of Craft, 39.

[30] Greenhalgh, The History of Craft, 26.

[31] Victoria and Albert Museum, "About Us," accessed July 2025, https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/about-us.

[32] In the library of the V&A Museum, most of the literature related to Eastern Europe is connected to the topics of the Cold War. Craft, decorative arts, and design were one of the central platforms and battle grounds of the Cold War. A major exhibition related to this issue was organised in Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin (2017-18): "Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War" examined the role of Modernism and modernist art and cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, particularly through the lens of the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). The exhibition showed how cultural institutions and intellectual figures were involved in the ideological battle, disguised under the veil of art autonomy.

The term "applied arts" originated in the early industrial period in Europe, particularly in Britain and Germany. In the late nineteenth century, many European schools of arts and crafts—known in German as Kunstgewerbeschulen[33]—were founded, institutionalizing the applied arts as a distinct domain alongside the fine arts.[34] These schools trained designers and craftsmen in aesthetic production for everyday use, including furniture, textiles, ceramics, metalwork, glasswork, typography, and later architecture and fashion. Over time, the term "applied arts" gradually gave way to "design." These divisions reflect a relatively modern, Eurocentric construct that fails to account for historical and cultural complexity. Such distinctions are of limited usefulness when evaluating craft, art, or design-related production across different cultures and periods. In other parts of the world, these distinctions did not develop in parallel. For example, Islamic art in many periods consists entirely of the decorative arts, as is the case in many other cultures. Numerous examples of material culture are highly valued for engaging simultaneously with practical function, spiritual and ritual significance, aesthetics, and social meaning.

Terminology and classification developed instantly in the nineteenth century, as industrialization reshaped how objects and social relationships were made and valued. In the early twentieth century, other related terms and classifications emerged. For example, Material Culture, which focuses on the cultural meaning of everyday objects; Folk Art, referring to vernacular forms of making; and Industrial Design. Understanding terminology reveals how ideas concerning the roles of art, craft, decoration, and design have been continually reshaped by cultural, economic, and technological shifts. These changes manifested both materially and conceptually through different styles, each accompanied by specific terminology.

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[33] In French or Italian, there is no exact equivalent for *craft*, and in many non-European languages, there are likewise no terms that clearly distinguish among art, craft, and industry as English does. German terminology, although etymologically related, developed differently for theoretical and social reasons. The German term *Handwerk* (literally "hand-work") is often translated as *craft*, though its literal meaning is quite different.

[34] *Applied arts* is translated into German as *Kunstgewerbe* or *angewandte Künste*, and *Kunsthandwerk*—none of which employ the word *craft* (*Kraft*). For a thorough analysis of the relationship between terminology, craft reform, and industry in the German context, see Stefan Muthesius, "Handwerk/Kunsthandwerk," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 120–31.

Movements like Art Nouveau in France and Belgium, the Deutscher Werkbund[35] in Germany, Art Deco in France, Jugendstil and Sezessionstil in Austria, and later the Bauhaus in Germany emerged in parallel across Europe, each responding differently to industrialization and economic change. While Art Nouveau embraced organic forms and extensive decorative elegance, the Werkbund and Bauhaus pursued functionalism and unity between art, craft, and industry, reflecting a broader societal shift. Similar movements also arose in Southern Europe and beyond.

Art Nouveau sought to break down the distinction between fine arts and applied arts, and Jugendstil developed the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total work of art"), unifying architecture, furnishings, and interior art in a common style. Adolf Loos, a fierce critic of both styles, condemned ornamentation as socially and culturally regressive, calling it a crime, and advocated a shift toward greater functionality as a marker of cultural progress. Although controversial at the time, Loos's ideas became foundational for European modernist architecture, where structure, and clarity replaced ornament for its own sake. Throughout all these debates, craft maintained a central—albeit backstage—role.

A new kind of divergence between craft and art emerged within the avant-garde, whose conceptual turn often de-emphasized craftsmanship in favor of ideas, performance, and institutional critique. Readymades exemplify this shift, privileging concept over artisan skill, yet many avant-garde artists also revalued craft in innovative ways.[36] This divergence, once again, arose primarily externally—from the theoretical discourse and institutional hierarchies.

The Bauhaus, founded in 1919 in Weimar, recognized the importance of dismantling hierarchies and merging again fine art, craft, and industry, now shaped by technological developments. In 1923, Walter Gropius, architect and founder of the Bauhaus, intro-

[35] The Deutscher Werkbund (German: Work Federation), founded in 1907 in Munich, was an association of artists, architects, designers, and industrialists that aimed to integrate traditional craftsmanship with modern industrial production, laying groundwork for what would later influence the Bauhaus.

[36] Sophie Taeuber-Arp, for instance, was deeply engaged in textile arts and weaving within Dada and Constructivist circles.

duced the slogan "Art and Technology – A New Unity," signaling a reorientation toward collaboration with industry without abandoning craft and craftsmanship. In its first proclamation (1919), the Bauhaus founders declared:

> "Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all turn to the crafts …. There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman … Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions which arise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist.[37]"

Unfortunately, the Bauhaus declaration was not realized in post−World War II hierarchies, as traditional divisions between art, craft, and industry largely persisted.

The term "Studio Craft" gradually emerged in the twentieth century in the United States, arising from the postwar educational system. It became embedded in academic and curatorial language, distinguishing its practice from mass-produced goods and the so-called traditional folk craft. Studio Craft, or the Studio Craft Movement, refers to craft practiced in an artist's studio, emphasizing hand−made work, often without utility, and foregrounding the maker's craftsmanship, intention, and material intelligence. The movement gained grip in the United States, Britain, and beyond, supported by institutions, exhibitions, and theoretical discourse that understood craft as a parallel yet distinct mode alongside fine art. Its practices largely remained in a separate sphere from the contemporary art scene, 'occupying' the name 'craft'. According to Glenn Adamson, "As a field of production, studio craft is still unswervingly devoted to the creation of "objects." It is defined by the mastery and enactment of a set of readily identified "actions" (throwing a pot, making a basket, etc.). And, as its very name suggests, it has not yet begun to grapple with the realities of the "post-studio" environment.[38]" […] "studio craft's dilemma may be better captured not in the word "craft" at all, but rather "studio".[39]" Some individuals and institutions, such as Black Mountain College, attempted to integrate craft into neoavant−garde conceptual educational settings, repositioning it as a serious artistic practice fitting in their approach of "learning by doing".

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[37] Walter Gropius, quoted in Peter Dormer, ed., *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 4.

[38] Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 166.

[39] Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 166.

Throughout all these developments, craft has persisted as a site of experimentation, ethical reflection, and material intelligence, continually negotiating its position alongside art, design, and industry.

1.4: Craft and Utopia

Connections of Craft to Art, Design, and Society

As discussed in the previous chapters, craft is elusive and resists easy definition. It is closely intertwined with art and design, which themselves defy simple categorization. How, then, are these domains crucially connected, and what lies at the heart of their relationship?

Craft, art, and design have long been entangled with questions of society and its formation, and their junction is often most clearly expressed in utopian visions. Each of these domains carries a system of value that reflects how societies understand virtue, responsibility, care, and ethical conduct. From the utopian ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement to contemporary debates on consumerism, sustainability, and social justice, craft, art, and design are repeatedly remodeled not only on aesthetic or functional grounds but also on ethical ones. This is why reflection on craft inevitably leads to the question of utopia—not only as a vision of potential societies but also as a mode of critique of existing ones.

Today's profound crisis of values compels us to reexamine the idea of utopia. This thesis considers craft as a carrier of utopian ideals and as a prism through which to search (and act) for new forms of social commentary. What happens if we approach craft not only as a set of techniques that shape material but also as a principle of being in society—a principle that encompasses immaterial labor, care, and responsibility? In this sense, craft is an active process that unites utopian ambition with practical demands, without being reduced to a retreat into nostalgic moralism or a vehicle for moral approval.

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There is a persistent cultural suspicion that links craft to nostalgia and impractical idealism. Yet such a dismissal overlooks the deeper relation between craft, and the utopia.

Rafael Cardoso observes: “Enthusiasts of craft production are routinely cast as ineffectual utopians or hopeless Romantics, vainly attempting to turn back the hands of time.[40]” It is, as he explains, because “craft continues to be viewed as a historical stage superseded by industry.” which is, as already written, a misconception of craft.

The idea of utopia has historically relied on craft as a foundation for imagining alternative social orders. Craft has served as a bearer of ideals for the future, a medium through which social, moral, and ethical values are expressed, tested, and sustained. Craft can (once again) be understood as both a practical and moral tool for shaping alternative models of society. Utopian imagination depends on craft to articulate and materialize new visions of a society.

The word *utopia* was coined in 1516 by Sir Thomas More from Ancient Greek, for his Latin text *Utopia*. It literally translates as "no place", referring to a society that does not yet exist. In More’s *Utopia*, craft is inseparable to societal organization, learning, adaptability, and transformation. The book’s central concerns, greed, private property, wealth inequality, and the justice system, remain as pressing today as in the sixteenth century. Written during the High Renaissance, *Utopia* criticizes corruption and proposes an ethical model of society. In Utopia, every citizen, regardless of gender, is trained in a particular craft (such as weaving, masonry, or carpentry) so that skilled making becomes a shared responsibility. Craft is understood not merely as manual labor, but as an essential component of education, innovation, and collective self-sufficiency.

In More’s vision, craft ensured equality and collective welfare, and also symbolized harmony between intellectual and manual pursuits, deconstructing the inherited divide between the “mechanical” and “liberal” arts. This approach to craft resurfaced centuries later in the Arts and Crafts movement. Nineteenth century reformers drew directly on

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40 Rafael Cardoso, “Craft versus Design: Moving beyond a Tired Dichotomy,” in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 321.

More's vision, framing craft as a means to reconcile labor, beauty, and social justice.[41] Furthermore, William Morris introduced art in this equation, and viewed both craft and art as inseparable from ethical living. He sought to dissolve the boundaries between art, work, and life, insisting that 'design' must improve everyday life. Morris also critiqued degradation of nature, or in today's terms, the environmental destruction, advocating instead that humans should live in harmony with nature.

Those conceptual threads continued evolving, and are to be found in the utopian visions of Richard Buckminster Fuller. Nearly a century after Morris, Fuller once again reimagined production, and proposed utopianism grounded in modern technology and design and elaborated further on a sustainable society. Like Morris, he critiqued wasteful industry, but militarism too. Fuller articulated an alternative in which he saw humanity as part of a global, interconnected ecological and technological network.

More, Morris and Fuller together form a lineage in which craft, and within it ethical design and social critique, establish a structure for envisioning alternative worlds. For Morris, craft was the ethical and aesthetic foundation of a socialist utopia, proposed as a resistance to industrial alienation. Fuller, working more with advanced technologies than handcraft, extended this principle into what he called "design science": an approach to intelligent, resource-efficient making. Both reframed craft not as mere technique but as a moral practice, proposing that the way we make (work) ultimately determines the way we live together and the very structure of society.

Fuller traced the origins of his concepts to his great aunt's involvement with the Transcendentalists movement of the nineteenth century as well as his own formative experience on board ships as a naval officer. Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) was a prominent literary woman, often described as America's first feminist, and an important figure among the Transcendentalists alongside Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David

[41] 'Nowhere,' from William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, is equivalent to 'Utopia,' meaning 'no place.'

Thoreau. Transcendentalist[42] emphasis on moral reform, holistic thought and social transformation, and the interrelation of individual and society all profoundly shaped Fuller's practical and philosophical utopianism.

Fuller translated Transcendentalist spiritual ideals of interconnectedness into the technological and ecological language of the twentieth century, crystallized in his famous metaphor of Spaceship Earth.[43] He suggested that the planet Earth is a self-contained vessel, like a spaceship, with finite resources and a fragile life-support system, encouraging everyone on Earth to act as a harmonious crew working toward a sustainable future and survival.

> "We are not going to be able to operate our Spaceship Earth successfully nor for much longer unless we see it as a whole spaceship and our fate as common. It has to be everybody or nobody.[44]"

The metaphor of *Spaceship Earth* echoes an earlier Transcendentalist concern with the invisible patterns of nature and humanity's embeddedness within them. This philosophical principle was articulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1836 essay *Nature*. Emerson, originally a Unitarian minister, gradually distanced himself from the religious beliefs of his contemporaries, leaving the church. In his writings he advocated for intellectual and spiritual independence in one's belief and a spiritual connection to nature, instead of blind acceptance of tradition. Emerson's thoughts exerted wide influence, most notably on Henry David Thoreau, who actively tried to live them out in his own notorious experiment – a two-year self-sufficient stay at a cabin he built near Walden Pond, and described in the philosophical memoir *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854). Although Thoreau did not elaborate directly on craft, the principles he applied in *Walden* are closely connected to it. His experiment at Walden Pond resonates with several craft

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[42] Although somewhat separated in time and geographically, American Transcendentalism and the English Arts and Crafts Movement developed parallel visions in which nature, ethics, and creative labor offered the foundations for social renewal. Both searched for harmony between ethical life, natural world, and creative practice: Transcendentalism grounding this vision in spiritual philosophy while Arts and Crafts through practices of craft and design.

[43] Fuller elaborated this metaphor, most famously, in the book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969). This book was a call for a fundamental paradigm shift. It urged humanity to move from a mindset of competition and resource hoarding to one of global cooperation, rational design, and shared responsibility.

[44] R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969).

aspects: simplicity, economy of means, and an ethic of living attuned to nature. *Walden* exerted a profound and lasting influence, for more than a century, shaping reactions from environmentalism to countercultural movements.

As Morris introduced art into utopian thought, Fuller added design to it. He argued that what humanity needed was an individual who could recognize the universal patterns inherent in nature and design new technologies for everyday life in accord with these patterns and with the resources already made available by the business world and the military industry. This individual would be "an emerging synthesis of artist, inventor, mechanic, objective economist and evolutionary strategist […] who could see what the bureaucrat could not: the whole picture"—in Fuller's term, a *Comprehensive Designer*[45]. Fuller's idea of comprehensivity echoes the ethos of craft. It can be described as a quality of thinking that aspires to be, in Fuller's words, "adequately macro-comprehensive and micro-incisive".

Fuller's comprehensive visions still largely remain utopian, and the search for "synergistic" solutions is still on. His call for comprehensivity resonated strongly in the Western cultural climate of the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by consumerism and militarism. The anti-establishment cultural phenomenon and political movement known as the counterculture embraced Fuller as a figure who combined technological imagination with social critique, offering models for new ways of living. His proposals[46] were not simply technical solutions but also symbolic rejections of the dominant order. Fuller's utopianism was a demand that design and technology address the survival of the species rather than serve only economic growth, industrial expansion, or military power. The task of imagining "comprehensive" and "synergistic" alternatives remains utopian, unfinished—and still urgently necessary.

Although a comprehensive and synergistic way of life remains out of reach, many of the ideas presented in Buckminster Fuller's work were further developed by others. Though

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[45] The term was introduced by Fuller in his 1963 book, *Ideas and Integrities*.

[46] E.g. geodesic domes and resource-efficient dwellings.

not a utopian himself, Fuller's contemporary and admirer Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian media theorist, expressed a prophetic idea that electronic media would shrink the world, transforming it from a vast, fragmented space into a single, interconnected community—a "Global Village.[47]" This concept differs from Fuller's vision of *Spaceship Earth*, which imagined humanity functioning sustainably and in unity. McLuhan foresaw that the Global Village could also have a darker side, one we now experience: a digital landscape that enables manipulation, surveillance, and control concentrated in the hands of a powerful few. Contemporary technological development has largely lost the connection to the ethos of craft that were central in Fuller's visions: ecological integrity, egalitarian goals, and synergy with nature.

The ethos of craft is also incompatible with the military industry. As Fuller described, militarism is a monumentally wasteful and destructive system—the most inefficient and misdirected use of Earth's resources and of humanity's intellectual genius, and, we might add, of craft's potential. For it is the presence of the ethos of craft that distinguishes construction from destruction. Why, then, do ideas and products of design so often appear within today's most destructive developments?

Design is easily redirected toward profit, control, and domination. As in the time of William Morris and later Buckminster Fuller, it is again and again crucial to ask whether contemporary technological development has lost its connection to the craft ethos—and, if so, what alternative paths might be imagined and done. Efforts in such alternative, craft-based approaches to technological development can be traced in Techoutopism. Emerging from both utopian thinking and the countercultural experiments of the late twentieth century, it approached technologies as instruments for fostering social equity, sustainability, and meaningful human engagement. Technoutopians echo craft ethos applied to the challenges and opportunities of the digital age. It is tech-

[47] The term was introduced in McLuhan's 1962 book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: *The Making of Typographic Man*.

noutopians—and, more specifically, hackers and hacktivists[48]—who have continued to grapple with the ethical dimensions of technological development. By engaging directly with both software and hardware, they explore how technologies can be designed, shared, and used in ways that prioritize synergy and collective benefit. Their practices often combine technical ingenuity with the craft ethos of attention, care, and systemic thinking championed by Fuller and Papanek. In this sense, certain technoutopian interventions can serve as contemporary experiments in applying craft principles to the digital and networked world.

Examples of technoutopian practice include open-source software communities, collaborative hardware projects, and hacktivist initiatives such as the Free Software Foundation or Creative Commons. These projects prioritize sharing, transparency, and collective problem-solving, directly challenging proprietary and profit-driven models. They demonstrate that technology can be both a material and ethical practice, where making is inseparable from responsibility toward society and the environment. Like Arts and Craft movement which imagined craft and art being building blocks of utopian society, Technoutopism imagined the future through a collective use of technological goods.

[48] "[..] the word hacker was a collective term used to describe those who advanced this undeveloped field by performing innovative development work on the fringes of the fixed military-industrial research programs, at their own initiative, in their own free time, alone or in groups, contributing to the digital technology of today." in Laczkó, Juli. *The Art of Hacking, Intersections between Hacker Culture and Visual Arts.* Budapest: The Hungarian University of Fine Arts and Balatonfüred Városért Közalapítvány, 2021, 17.

1.5: Ethics and Craft / Art / Design

It is important to avoid simplistic and naïve association of craft with moral integrity. This thesis and the proposal for 'A Paraphrase of Craft' do not seek to idealize craft as automatically ethical. Rather, it approaches craft as a complex, yet different way to undertake social commentary, in order to avoid what might be called an "ethical trap." Craft, and therefore craftsmanship, like any form of human labor, can serve both constructive and destructive ends.

As utopian thinkers have long warned, to make a product in any particular way (design, art, etc.) is to render a value judgment and, in effect, to create a new moral statement. Every act of making is an ethical decision, for it shapes human behaviour and produces consequences for the non-human environment. Ethics, in other words, is not an abstract consideration; it is embedded in the very act of making.

The domains of art and design have each addressed ethical questions in their own ways, though often inconsistently and, at times, by neglecting them. One of the most important manifestos of design, and a milestone in establishing an ethical framework for the profession, is Victor Papanek's *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*[49] (1971). Much like the arguments of John Ruskin and William Morris, Papanek launched an important critique of his era, arguing that most designers were failing their moral responsibility and were "committing a crime" by producing wasteful and irresponsible products in service of consumerism. He famously stated, "There are professions more harmful than industrial design, but only a very few of them.[50]" Although controversial at first, the book resonated deeply with a later generation. Following Buckminster Fuller, Papanek extended his critique to the military industry, which he saw as a colossal waste of resources. He argued that designers were using their skills to create weapons of destruction and systems of violence rather than addressing urgent

[49] Victor Papanek, Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change, Toronto/New York/London: Bantam Books, 1973.

[50] Papanek, Design for the Real World, 14.

problems such as poverty, hunger, and disease—an omission he considered a profound ethical failure. He challenged designers for their complicity, insisting they recognize their role as active participants in a system of violence, and consumption. A pioneer in advocating for sustainable design, Papanek insisted that designers consider a product's entire life cycle—from its materials to its eventual disposal. His arguments helped shape the fields of sustainable, humanitarian, and social design.

> "The ultimate job of design is to transform man's environment and tools and, by extension, man himself.[51]"

If Papanek diagnosed the profession's moral failure, Victor Margolin reopened the question of ethics at a broader human scale. In his 2007 essay, "Design, the Future and the Human Spirit," Victor Margolin writes that we need to "reconfigure the ethical discussions, however modest, that have historically been part of design discourse. At the core of a new design ethics is the question of what it means to be human.[52]" He continues, arguing that we must "foreground the question of how to create an ethics of designing that can suggest humanly satisfying directions for future work. This is a collective task for the design community whose grasp of the future will continue to determine how we live in the present.[53]"

Hal Foster also offers a critical perspective on the present condition. In his essay *Design and Crime* (2002), he argues that design has betrayed its socially progressive roots, to be found in avant-garde, and has become a tool of consumer capitalism. He critiques a shift away from the functional and ethical principles of movements like the Bauhaus toward a focus on commercial spectacle and superficial aesthetics. For Foster, the original "crime" of design is its failure to serve human needs, instead becoming complicit with corporate power. He calls for artists and designers to reclaim a critical and socially engaged role.

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[51] Papanek, Design for the Real World, 42.

[52] Victor Margolin, "Design, the Future, and the Human Spirit," *Design Issues* 23, no. 3 (2007): 4–15, accessed October 3, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1162/desi.2007.23.3.4

[53] Margolin, "Design, the Future, and the Human Spirit"

Boris Groys, too, sees design as one of the primary arenas in which ethical responsibility is exercised. In essays such as “The Obligation to Self-Design” and “Self-Design and Public Space,” he stresses that every act of design—whether in art, media, or everyday objects—constitutes an ethical act. This framing connects to his broader claim that the traditional line between art and design has collapsed, and that art has increasingly adopted the form and function of design in modern and contemporary culture, following a trajectory that began with the avant-garde. His argument is rooted in the history of twentieth-century movements such as Russian Constructivism, which sought to dismantle the distinction between art and life. They envisioned art as a tool for actively shaping society, space, and human behavior—a mission Groys identifies as the very essence of design.

Taken together, these thinkers expose the double nature of design: at once a tool of consumer capitalism and a site of ethical responsibility. The connection between art and design also echoes long-standing utopian ideas in which art ceases to exist as a separate category, merging instead with the practices of everyday life.

In many utopian visions described in literature, art as conventionally understood—bound by hierarchies, markets, and institutions—is absent. Yet art does not vanish entirely; rather, it dissolves into everyday life, dispersed across all aspects of existence instead of being performed within a specialized domain. This raises an interesting observation: what propels some artists to undertake the role of moral inquiry, of carrying out ethical work and why is it craft, rather than art, that occupies such a central position in utopian imaginaries?

If utopian thinkers imagined the dissolution of art into life, the 1990s “social turn” in contemporary art seemed to enact this dissolution in a particular way, through ethical and communal practice. Social awareness and commentary became dominant concerns in the period and artists pursued critical approaches that often involved abandoning the exclusive artist’s authorship and moving away from the creation of objects toward art that is engaged, collaborative, and participatory. These practices, however, risked falling

into a paradox: criticizing social structures and hierarchy while still relying on them. New terms such as “community-based art,” “relational aesthetics,” and “new genre public art” emerged to describe these forms of production. Since the 1990s, commentators and critics have noted a “social turn” in contemporary art in which art has been evaluated for its perceived social or moral “good”[54] and ethical outcomes (e.g. community impact). This tendency is at the core of Claire Bishop’s well-known critique, developed in essays such as “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” and “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents.” Bishop argues that the dominant discourse surrounding these practices often prioritized social effect and ethical intention over considerations of artistic quality. What Bishop critiques as the prioritization of ethical and social effect over aesthetic judgment can also be understood, in another register, as art’s dissolution into everyday life where moral values become embedded directly in the act of making.

Glenn Adamson reflects on this in his works about craft, arguing that while socially engaged art gained visibility and entered critical debate, craft was left out and marginalized for its ties to similar “ethical” characteristics: labor, skill, responsibility, concern for materials and community. Unlike art, which could “turn social” and still be theorized, craft’s ethical dimensions were diminished and displaced into other cultural spheres. This contrast highlights why craft occupies such a different position in modern thought, and why the 1990s “social turn” in art is not general. Craft has always carried the ethical weight that art only recently sought to claim.

Today’s practitioners—designers, artists, and theorists—operate in an increasingly complicated environment. Ethics, together with technology, has entered an unknown area, where the moral implications of many actions are becoming ever more complex.

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[54] “Whereas such art was initially triggered by the artists’ rage over the hypocrisy of contemporary politics and art, the discourse’s efforts (and the artists’ assistance) has led it into the trap of worthiness (see also "social sensitivity"). And there are few things that would give an artist the feeling of castration more than having to think of him/herself as a worthy person.” – quotation from Miklós Erhardt's introduction to the translation of “The Emancipated Spectator” by Jacques Rancière, accessed October 3, 2025, https://exindex.hu/en/nem-tema/az-emancipalt-nezo/

Part 2.

2.1: Re-Reading Arts and Crafts

Why Are the Ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement Relevant Today?

Revisiting the Arts and Crafts movement today is not simply an exercise in historical appreciation, but also a way of approaching and understanding contemporary concerns. The Arts and Crafts movement (A&C) placed craft at the center of debates about society, art, and the ethics of making—debates that remain unfinished and important. An engaged examination of A&C challenges us to rethink the relationships between craft and art, design and industry, not as settled topics from the past, but as living conditions that shape the way we live and work. Reexamining A&C today means asking whether there are principles and visions we have forgotten or abandoned—ones that can be revived or reimagined in order to guide us through the complex technological systems shaping life today.

The A&C movement was the first attempt at the "reinvention" (or paraphrasing) of craft. This is because the A&C movement did not see craft as a lesser form of art or merely an outdated mode of production or decoration, but as a universal framework for a more just society and as the essence of human activities. To think through craft, to take it both as a social ideal and a material practice, was a radical act, as much at the end of the nineteenth century as it is today. Besides their interest in the reciprocity of ethical and aesthetic virtues, the A&C ideas were directed toward future society and utopia, yet they were often considered nostalgic. The A&C movement was in fact, like craft itself, anachronistic.

Returning to the A&C, as well as later innovative insights about craft, is important for understanding misconceptions surrounding craft. For many the notion of craft is somehow "problematic." Apart from the usual connotation of a handmade, skill-based object production, too often the practices associated with craft are linked to some form

of amateurism. Furthermore, craft is often exploited as a means of promoting traditional values, an authentic past or national identity. In recent years, craft has also re-emerged as a way of offering alternative values to those of industrial production, mass consumerism and digitalization and also as a way of claiming authenticity. Today, craft is invoked by a wide range of actors—from DIY activists and hobbyists to entrepreneurs and politicians. The question is how to understand craft in its full scope.

The conventional narrative holds that the Industrial Revolution replaced craftsmen and artisans with machines, degrading the quality of things produced, and that, in response, the A&C movement emerged as a backward-looking call. The problem with this explanation is that it positions modernization as opposed to craft, treating them as mutually incompatible. Yet it is misleading to understand craft as the opposite of modernization. Craft has been integral to every epoch of development, and is in fact both"modern" and "antimodern". The A&C movement did advocate for a return to skilled craftsmanship and traditional materials as a protest against the dehumanizing effects of industrial mass production, but not in a regressive way. In essence, the A&C movement proposed to not only make, but more importantly, to *think through craft* in order to evaluate the shifting values and in order to reimagine society anew.

The ideals of A&C were not realized, but craft did not disappear either. In various forms, craft is deeply embedded in labor and production, from the Industrial Revolution, through Modernism, to Post-Fordism, and more recently into the neoliberal global economy. Our epoch of mass production and mass consumerism has not only introduced new digital technologies, but it has also distanced those in the Western world from physical production. Many aspects of our lives have become dematerialized. This does not mean that craft has dissolved from contemporary life; rather, its scope has expanded. Craft's power lies in its dual nature: it is both a utilitarian practice and a carrier of meaning, value, and utopian ideals. Craft is a way of living out certain values in the material world, a way beyond materiality.

> "William Morris, who is an essential reference point in these conversations still, ran headlong into that problem. He's a socialist, politically speaking. But

he also wants to make things that are beautiful, and he wants to do it by hand in the best possible way. That becomes almost like a division in his soul, you might say. How does he bring those two things into alignment? In many ways, he didn't, and couldn't. It's an inherent contradiction.

For me, maybe the thing to say is that that contradiction speaks to a deeper tension in our culture, that we have to continually work on and balance out. How do we think about quality of life, on the one hand, versus baseline economic advantage on the other? You can't just pick one of them. They're inherently in a kind of balance with one another. Craft is a place where those two imperatives meet, and clash, and get worked out.[55]" (Glenn Adamson)

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For a longer context on the relevance of the A&C movement see three further chapters: John Ruskin, William Morris and Contemporary Art Reference to the Arts and Crafts Movement. (p. 42-49)

Drawing on the legacy of the A&C movement and on later thinkers of craft, the **section 2.2.** outlines the key perspectives essential for understanding the notion of craft. This part of the thesis serves as a collection of guiding notes, and it takes the form of a L**exicon**. It is arranged not alphabetically, but thematically in groups of related terms, to emphasize their overlapping meanings.

The Lexicon spans Part 2. and Part 3. of the thesis: the first section of the Lexicon addresses questions that emerged in the aftermath of the A&C movement, while the second section examines the enduring and foundational aspects of craft itself. These terms have been studied extensively in their own specialized scholarship. The purpose here is not to explain or define them, but to bring them together in one picture, from the specific angle of this thesis.

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[55] Bailey, Spencer. Interview with Glenn Adamson. *"Glenn Adamson on Craft as a Reflection of Ourselves." Time Sensitive* (podcast), episode 50. Accessed October 27, 2025. https://timesensitive.fm/episode/glenn-adamson-on-craft-as-a-reflection-of-ourselves/

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John Ruskin, who was a leading English art critic, social theorist, and writer of his time on subjects ranging from architecture to political economy, wrote in 1862:

> "Suppose some day it should turn out that 'mere' thought was in itself a recommendable object of production...[56]" (John Ruskin, *Unto This Last*)

In his writings, John Ruskin (1819–1900) dealt with the complex interconnections of cultural, social, and moral issues. We should not take Ruskin's writings literally. He was writing during a period of accelerated change, so some of his views may have altered even during his own time. He was an art critic and social thinker, and in his work the two disciplines were closely intertwined. He insisted that art and society must have the virtues of craftsmanship, which for him was the combination of aesthetic vision and moral rigor.

> "Under the term "skill" I mean to include the united force of experience, intellect, and passion in their operation on manual labour: and under the term "passion" to include the entire range and agency of the moral feelings….[57]"

His texts, even though criticized in many respects since their publication, have nevertheless had a wide influence. His essay on economy, "Unto This Last," written in 1860, which was "very violently criticized", is effectively his manifesto. It was admired by Mahatma Gandhi, the pioneer of civil-disobedience, who even translated it into Gujarati in 1908. Gandhi found inspiration for his own social and economic ideas in Ruskin's essay and drew on it in shaping his political philosophy of *sarvodaya*[58]—which means "welfare of all." Because the essay also criticizes the destructive effects of industrialism

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[56] John Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Essays on Political Economy* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862), Essay IV, "Ad Valorem," Project Gutenberg, accessed September 12, 2025, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36541/36541-h/36541-h.htm

[57] Ruskin, Unto This Last, Essay II.

[58] Sarvodaya is a social and political philosophy that aims for the welfare and well-being of every individual in society, without any discrimination. It emphasizes that personal well-being is intrinsically linked to the collective well-being of the community. It calls for equal dignity of all types of labor and professions, rejecting the idea of some work being superior to others. It promotes the value of manual labor and self-sufficiency, advocating for a simple, non-exploitative lifestyle. Sarvodaya goes beyond simple material welfare to include the moral, intellectual, and spiritual progress of every individual in society.

upon the natural world, some historians regard it as precursor of the Green Movement in the twentieth century.

John Ruskin was writing during the nineteenth century's Industrial Revolution, when craft and craftsmanship seemed under threat. We now face a comparable moment in development—one in which automation, mass consumerism, and the erosion of material knowledge echo the conditions Ruskin critiqued in his time. Ruskin worried about machines replacing skilled craft labor. Today, automation, AI, and digital fabrication similarly displace established skills and alter the value of human labor. In addition, globalized supply chains distance us even more from the physical reality of production.

> "So what, in the end, is Ruskin's enduring legacy? It is not, surely, what those following in his footsteps, or those of Morris and Gandhi, often take it to be: that we need to return to a life of craftsy self-sufficiency, in which the howling complexities of capitalism are shut out as firmly as possible. If anything, a sensitive reading of *Unto This Last* suggests precisely the opposite: that our job, whether we are artists, critics, or workers of some other kind, is to reflect on the productive reality in which we find ourselves and reproduce what we see in a more "affective" way. Too often, craft is taken as a means of dropping out of modernity. But Ruskin would not want us to retreat—not to a commune, nor a pottery studio, nor a knitting circle. He would want us to engage. In many ways, we inhabit a moment that is not only post-Fordist and postmodern, but also post-Ruskinian. Many of his pieties now ring false. But at least one of his ideas has never been more pertinent.[59]" (Glenn Adamson)

[59] Glenn Adamson, "The Ties That Bind," *Glenn Adamson*, accessed September 12, 2025, https://www.glennadamson.com/work/2017/8/2/the-ties-that-bind

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> "It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do which shall be worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do; and which should be done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious.[60]"
> (William Morris, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil")

Even though John Ruskin laid the philosophical groundwork of the Arts and Crafts movement and was its intellectual pioneer and theorist, it was William Morris who set the movement[61] in motion. Their importance is therefore inseparable. Ruskin provided the core ideas about the relationship between craft and the healing of society. Morris sought to realize and extend those ideals.

There are many angles from which to approach William Morris, especially regarding the continuing relevance of his ideas and the ways in which his concerns anticipated problems of today's consumer society. William Morris (1834–1896) was an exceptional figure: his many talents and mastery of multiple techniques made him difficult to categorize, as he was active in a complex mixture of crafts, arts, literature, and politics. Whatever he did or made, he believed that good design and art were essential to the making of a good society.

Morris is often described as a central artist of the Arts and Crafts Movement and as the greatest pattern designer of his time in Britain. Yet his importance lies beyond that. He

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[60] William Morris, *Art and Socialism* (1884), in *Art and Socialism*, Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1884/as/as.htm

[61] The name of the movement developed from the term "*Arts and Crafts*" was first used by T. J. Cobden-Sanderson. It was officially adopted in 1887, when the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was founded in London by designers and craftsmen who felt that the decorative arts received too little attention. The society's main aim was to raise the status of craftsmanship and to argue that the decorative arts were equal in value to the "fine arts." The society's first president, Walter Crane, a prolific artist and illustrator, wrote: "We desired first of all to give opportunity to the designer and craftsman to exhibit their work to the public for its artistic interest, and thus to assert the claims of decorative art and handicraft to attention equally with the painter of easel pictures, hitherto almost exclusively associated with the term art in the public mind. Ignoring the artificial distinction between Fine and Decorative art, we felt that the real distinction was between good and bad art, or false and true taste and methods in handicraft, considering it of little value to endeavour to classify art according to its commercial value or social importance […]."

was “one of those men whom history will never overtake.[62]” His art, designs, writings, and socialist activism function together as a whole. Morris’s understanding of craft was inseparable from his ethics, aesthetics, and politics. Craft, for him, was not merely a method of making but a philosophy of life, a form of resistance to industrial capitalism, and a path to dignity, beauty, and social well-being. He wanted to reject the dehumanizing effects of industrialization, and thus gained a reputation as backward-looking. In fact, he did not oppose machines themselves but their misuse for profit and exploitation.

Morris envisioned a future in which people lived in harmony with nature and one another: a world with a new kind of consciousness, where work was fulfilling, resources respected, and all people lived in equality. His vision was also ecological: he saw industrial capitalism as destructive to both people and nature and regarded traditional craft as a means of restoring balance and renewing the human connection to the earth.

While he sought to revive the beauty and craftsmanship of earlier periods, particularly the Middle Ages, he did so in the service of social and economic justice rather than nostalgia. He did not idealize the Middle Ages as a golden age, recognizing its violence, slavery, and superstition. What he admired was the pleasure in work he believed medieval craftsmen experienced: they were protected by guilds, controlled their tools and time, and were not forced into hurried production.

Morris's life and work were not without contradiction. Even though he was a socialist, he came from a privileged background and was a business owner—a manufacturer of fashionable luxuries. Although he advocated for simple living, the furnishings produced by his successful firm, *Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.* (founded in 1861, later *Morris & Co.*), were highly elaborate. Morris is also regarded as an important influence in architectural history, although he never built a building himself. For him, architecture was the foundation of all the arts and a framework for his design thinking. He wrote extensively on the subject, as did Ruskin. Figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter

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[62] E. P. Thompson, “William Morris and the Moral Issues Today,” *Arena* 2, no. 8 (June–July 1951): 25–30, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed September 1, 2025, https://www.marxists.org/archive/thompson-ep/1951/william-morris.htm

Gropius drew from his ideas, which anticipated the Bauhaus's effort to dissolve the barriers between the craftsman and the artist.

At the foundation of Morris's artistic practice was pattern-making. It appears across all his work—from fabric and stained glass to embroidery and tapestry. Yet it was in book design that his role as designer, author, art reformer, and theoretician fully converged. In the 1890s he founded the Kelmscott Press[63], now credited with inspiring the modern independent press movement.

Besides all this, Morris eventually became an influential political figure, leaving a lasting mark on British socialism. He remains one of the most original socialist thinkers of his time, and his vision stands as both coherent and forward-looking. His lifelong engagement with craft binds together all of his fundamental observations: the nature of work, class struggle, modernization, the vulnerability of nature, and the moral basis for a new society.

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[63] The books featured hand-crafted typefaces, decorative initials, and woodcut illustrations—often in collaboration with artists such as Edward Burne-Jones. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1896), known as the *Kelmscott Chaucer*, is considered one of the finest books ever printed.

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The legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement continues to inform contemporary artistic practice, not only through explicit references but also through more subtle engagements with the principles of craft. Direct references are most visible among artists working in Great Britain, the cradle of the Industrial Revolution.

A special example is the practice of Will Holder, who works as a writer, editor, performer and book designer. *Middle of Nowhere* is Holder's rewriting of William Morris' utopian novel *News from Nowhere*, which was first published serialized in the Socialist League's journal *Commonweal*. Morris's novel, written partly in response to the American Edward Bellamy's best-selling utopian tale *Looking Backward, 2000–1887*, (1888), is a speculative picture of forthcoming time. It is a utopian description of a society in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Holder's *Middle of Nowhere*, also set approximately 115 years in the future, follows the chapter structure of the original, while taking into account significant phenomena of which Morris could have no knowledge. Described as "a guide for design education and practice set in 2135" it was also published in serialized form in *dotdotdot* magazine and other publications between 2005 and 2010. Central to Morris's original, the chapter "*Questions and Answers*" presents a dialogue between the visitor and a historian recounting the past 130 years; in Holder's version, the historian instead recounts the twenty-first century.

Similarly to Holder, artist Jeremy Deller addresses the past, present, and imagined futures through references to the Arts and Crafts movement in his work *English Magic*[64] (2013), originally conceived for the British Pavilion at the 55th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Deller's practice focuses on British society—its people, icons, myths, folklore/folk traditions, and its cultural and political history. He frequently explores working-class history and social movements, directly engaging with the Arts and Crafts movement's political roots. For Deller, just like for William Morris, art is in-

[64] Jeremy Deller, *English Magic*, 2013, British Pavilion, 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale; Jeremy Deller, accessed September 12, 2025, https://www.jeremydeller.org/EnglishMagic/English-Magic.php

separable from politics. The central element in *English Magic* is the figure of William Morris, prominently featured in a large mural at the entrance, destroying a modern superyacht. In the artwork, Morris is shown as a heroic, radical folk figure, symbolically dismantling the trappings of modern wealth and excess. Deller's use of Morris is not just a historical reference but a direct engagement with the core themes of the Arts and Crafts movement and its legacy, linking it to a contemporary symbol of capitalist excess—the luxury yacht. Deller presents Morris as a timeless symbol of rebellion against inequality. The mural challenges dominant structures, suggesting that Morris's socialist ideals still carry transformative force.

Following in the steps of the Arts and Crafts movement, the artist Grayson Perry uses his art to bridge the traditional divide between art and craft, making no distinction between the artist and the craftsman. Throughout his practice Perry expresses his belief in the spiritual and social power of the handmade object. Created and displayed at the British Museum in 2011, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*[65] is a sculpture of an iron ship, sailing into the afterlife. The ship is surrounded with hand-made replicas of objects from the collections of the British Museum, representing crafts made through history by forgotten men and women whose work has survived into the present day. It honors an anonymous individual representing all those who created the artifacts of history—works often encountered but without any names attached to them. Perry's work is therefore also commenting on the question of authorship in relation to art and to craft. Like William Morris, who saw craft as a tool for social reform, Perry uses craft as a channel to comment on society. His vases and tapestries are loaded with political satire and personal observations.

Another artist whose work resonates with Arts and Crafts concerns is Simon Starling. His works engage with ideas of process, labor, and value. Like the Arts and Crafts movement, which valued the act of making as much as the finished object, Starling's art is often the record of a complex process, a journey. In *Shedboatshed* (2005), for exam-

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[65] More about Grayson Perry's project *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*:
https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/grayson-perry-tomb-unknown-craftsman
https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/guide/grayson-perry2/lyshallen/tomb-of-the-unknown-craftsman/
https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/sep/17/grayson-perry-tomb-craftsman-museum

ple, he disassembled a wooden shed, used the wood to build a boat, rowed it down a river to a museum, and then reassembled it into a shed for exhibition. Starling has described his work as a "physical manifestation of a thought process," one that often involves transforming objects into new constructions through handmade production. "No one could doubt the seriousness and complexity", Glenn Adamson notes, "with which Simon Starling employs the concepts of craft. His prize-winning *Shedboatshed* might possibly be a sign of things to come: a work in which all the thinking operates through process, but which makes no assumptions about the preconditions or results of that endeavor… Serious thinking about our own personal place in the environment, Starling suggests, will inevitably involve thinking through craft.[66]"

[66] Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 166.

2.2. LEXICON / Part 1.

ANACHRONISM

Thinking about craft today may at first sound like an anachronistic undertaking. Yet anachronism is intrinsic to craft, and this is one of its aspects that makes it so captivating. The Arts and Crafts movement itself was anachronistic—looking backward in order to imagine the future. John Ruskin, for example, used the term "Gothic Revival" not simply to describe a wish for a stylistic return to medieval architecture, but to symbolically argue for a moral and social revival of the values he believed Gothic buildings embodied. Glenn Adamson writes, "...it was Ruskin's tendency to suggest ways forwards by looking backwards". In *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin described the moral principles inherent in Gothic architecture, especially its celebration of imperfection and variations. For him, beauty arose from the visible evidence of the human hand, with its irregularities and variations. The essence of this thought is relevant today again, in the wake of contemporary automation.

Craft resists a linear timeline: it is able to carry past techniques, ideas, and meanings with the present ones, while pointing toward the future. There are also politically motivated anachronisms. Modernization theorists argue that nations and nationalism are distinctly modern phenomena, yet modern political movements frequently apply anachronistic elements to construct continuity with the past. Craft practices have been used for this purpose.

Craft is connected to memory. It can function as a medium for remembering, preserving, and sometimes mythologizing the past—whether in the service of nostalgia, politics, or utopian imagination.

It is impossible not to wonder: could the destructive trajectory of modern nationalism be avoided if the ethical and communal values found in the notion of craft had played a more central role in shaping modern society?

> "Craft's relation to time is complex–rather like a novel set in times past, but written in the authorial present. When the potential of this temporal structure is realized, craft can be a powerful mediator between the present and the past, and

> therefore between the individual and the collective." … " In short, modern craft is potent not in spite of its temporal impurity, but because of it. Its dynamics relation to memory provides a framework in which traumatic experiences can be processed, forms from the past renewed, questions of agency brought to the fore, and new possibilities explored, all at once.[67]"

NOSTALGIA

Thinking about craft in relation to anachronism inevitably brings up the topic of nostalgia—the emotional and cultural longing for the past, often embedded in material objects. Old craft objects, techniques, and customs are part of cultural heritage and personal identity, and therefore tend to be approached through the lens of nostalgia.

According to Svetlana Boym, there are two types of nostalgia: "*restorative*" nostalgia, which seeks to reconstruct the past as faithfully as possible and often manifests in full-scale reconstructions of monuments; and "*reflective*" nostalgia, which lingers on ruins, patina, and memory, acknowledging loss. Boym is critical of restorative nostalgia, noting that it "takes itself dead seriously." As she writes in her book, *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), the restorative nostalgia "characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths, and occasionally through conspiracy theories.[68]"

Craft is also directly connected to the bodily and sensory dimensions of experience—with the tangible, material world that carries traces of past epochs through smell, touch, and sound. In this way, nostalgia and craft share a deep connection through materiality and memory.

(INVENTED) TRADITIONS

The term 'tradition' has become increasingly complex in our time. Craft is often tied to tradition, which is usually framed as the opposite of progress. Because tradition carries weight and authority, there is a constant tension: how to innovate without breaking tra-

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[67] Glenn Adamson, The Invention of Craft, 210.

[68] Svetlana Boym, *Budućnost nostalgije* (Beograd: Geopoetika, 2005).

dition, and how to maintain continuity while allowing change. Craft is often a site where that tension takes place.

The question of traditions is extended by Eric Hobsbawm concept of "invented traditions", defined as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." Such traditions fabricate continuity with a "suitable" past, often in response to moments of social upheaval. In the *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), he argues that many traditions that appear ancient are, in fact, recent creations.

Invented traditions spread especially in the nineteenth century—the age of nationalism and industrialization. National symbols, rituals, and folk culture were mobilized to create cohesion and to legitimize power. As Hobsbawm notes, nations and nationalism are modern phenomena that paradoxically claim ancient origins: "Modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity… and so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion.[69]"

Traditions, therefore, are never purely inherited—they are constructed, mobilized, and continually reinvented. Craft has often been instrumentalized in this process. In connection with the above, and in relation to craft, it is also important to distinguish between revivalism and revisionism. Revivalism is a flexible practice, an act of bringing back an idea to life, believing that it holds a lost value needed in a new context. Revisionism is an inflexible act: it reshapes the past to serve present power. Architecture[70], and with it various old craft techniques, are frequently used as tools in such processes of historical revisionism.

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[69] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 14.

[70] One well-known example is the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, which stands on the site of the demolished post-war Palace of the Republic (a major governmental and cultural building in East Berlin, GDR) and is a controversial reconstruction of the former Prussian Imperial Palace (Berliner Schloss). Its erecting reactivated imperial imagery and raised ongoing debates about German heritage, colonialism, and the display of power.

PASTORAL

The pastoral, or *pastoral mode*, refers to a way of understanding craft through the lens of escapism, simplicity, and honesty. Craft has long been stereotypically positioned on the margins of dominant culture, tied to folk traditions or associated with the past, often seen as embodying authenticity and moral integrity. This pastoral framing is very ambivalent: the same imagery of the "folk" can serve very different political ends. The term *pastoral* in relation to craft was introduced by Glenn Adamson, in his book *Thinking Through Craft* (2007). Adamson criticizes recent pastoral narratives in craft writing, such as Matthew Crawford's book *The Case for Working with Your Hands* (2009), for applying stereotypical selective nostalgia—celebrating what is beautiful while ignoring the complexities of labor, and presenting craft through the figure of a heroic white male craftsman. "His prescription for the twenty-first century – everyone should go get a goddamn real job and work with their hands – scarcely seems a practical proposal for prosperity in a rapidly digitizing, massively connected economy.[71]" Adamson also warns that in recent times the rhetorical use of the pastoral has shifted across the political spectrum from left to right. He notes that the tide of the pastoral today is overwhelmingly conservative. There is a persistent blind spot in craft discourse—the tendency to overlook how craft operates politically—and he argues that making by hand should not be mistaken for an inherently progressive act.

In the past, craft and folk culture have been used both to support socialism and to underpin nationalist ideology. In many contexts, peasant craft traditions were mobilized as "original" forms of national style, while at the same time, artists sought ways to imagine non-national, even oppositional, practices. The pastoral thus becomes a point of conflict: who uses craft as a resource for radical opposition, and who as a tool for conservatism?

ANTIMODERN

As noted earlier in the thesis, Glenn Adamson has argued that craft is itself a modern invention, because "before the Industrial Revolution, and outside its sphere of influence, it was not possible to speak of craft as a separate field of endeavor—from what would it

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[71] Glenn Adamson, "The Revenge of the Pastoral," in *Post-craft. EP Vol. 3*, ed. Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2022), 107–18.

be separated?[72]" Yet that does not mean that craft is, in essence, modern. Craft can also be understood as antimodern. Or, to use a term borrowed from Svetlana Boym, "off-modern." This linguistic difference offers a more nuanced way of understanding craft's complex relationship to modernity and progress.

Craft is situated within modern systems of production, yet it also embodies alternative values to those of industry and consumerism. At the same time craft can offer alternative ways of working, producing, using or valuing, to those of the dominant modern logics of efficiency and consumption. Svetlana Boym proposed the term "off-modern" as a "detour into the unexplored potentials of the modern project." For her, "off-modern" describes a special kind of orientation. Unlike terms such as "post," "neo," or "trans," which suggest linear succession, "off" implies deviation, displacement, and reflection. As Boym writes, "the adverb *off* confuses our sense of direction; it makes us explore side-shadows and back alleys rather than the straight road of progress.[73]" Boym's concept addresses the exhaustion of both futurism and nostalgic restoration: "The twentieth century began with futuristic utopias and dreams of unending development and ended with nostalgia and quests for restoration. The twenty-first century cannot seek refuge in either.[74]" To be off-modern, then, is neither to reject modernity nor to idealize its past, but to inhabit its contradictions and to think alongside, across, and beyond its dominant narratives. Boym distinguished her approach from explicitly antimodern positions, warning that such stances can lead to fundamentalism or "restorative" nostalgia. Her theory helps us articulate craft. Craft's principles, its peace, material sensitivity, and ethical stance do not reject modern life but rethink it, exposing its neglected dimensions.

This off-modern approach resonates in contemporary, albeit still niche critique of the modern world's rigid divisions between nature, society, and technology (and craft, for that matter). The notion of craft, as proposed in this thesis, stands against such rigid divisions. Craft is situated between nature, society, and technology, and is therefore an

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[72] Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013. xvi

[73] Svetlana Boym, The Off-Modern Mirror, e-flux Journal 19.

[74] Boym, The Off-Modern Mirror

original mediator. It stands for the idea of what it is to be human and why the human-scale is important for our coexistence with the planet.

There is a new term - *otherwise*. It is a recent tendency that can be observed emerging around the latest art and design practices and which is dealing with troubling past historical discourses, problematic legacies (colonialism) and current struggles to rework those. "Thinking "otherwise" is another way of thinking that runs counter to the great modernist narratives. It locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-Eurocentric models of thinking.[75]"

REPAIR

Capitalist modernity, with its emphasis on growth, has fostered a 'throw away' mentality. Repair has come to seem uneconomical or unnecessary, replaced by the imperative of endless production and consumption. This however, has led to major crises. We now inhabit a world in which the scale of what must be repaired—materially, socially, and ecologically—is enormous and still expanding. Foremost among these is the natural world, damaged by the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and extractivism.

Heritage preservation theorist Wilfried Lipp called for bringing the world "back to equilibrium." In 1993, he coined the term "repair society," proposing it as a new societal guiding principle:

> "... we are in the midst of 'repair.' Things are being repaired everywhere. This refers, and I am just highlighting things by keywords here, to general environmental measures for the air (reducing emissions), water (quality, sewer systems, consumption), the oceans (reducing the stress factors on them), soil (over-use of fertilizers), wood, forests ('dying forests,' excessive logging, rainforests). [...] Something like a 'repair of the human' has been set in motion. [...] Eventually, the goal is a 'repair' of the system of labor primarily defined eco-

[75] Quotation from Danah Abdulla, excerpted from the book: Claudia Mareis and Nina Paim, eds., *Design Struggles: Intersecting Histories, Pedagogies, and Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2021), 11.

nomically in terms of production and sales, labor that is defined in this logic as an endless chain of abundance—accumulation—waste.[76]"

Lipp's call is complex, yet it resonates with the utopian ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. On a more basic level, a need for a 'repair society' means restoring individual agency—the capacity to care for and maintain one's surroundings, with their own skills and tools. This idea finds resonance in contemporary initiatives such as Repair Cafés, or community "mending circles", which promote collective action, sustainability, and sharing of knowledge. These movements bring repair into the public sphere as a political act, reclaiming the value of maintenance and longevity.

Together with the notion of craft, understanding of the concept of repair should not fall into the anachronistic trap of longing for a pre-industrial past. Nor should it be understood as anti-technological. Both craft and repair share a quality grounded in the process, embodied knowledge, patience, and attentiveness, valuing not only what is made but how it is made, maintained and cared for. Repair is a counterstrategy to destruction and disposability.

Repair is close to the term 'Tinkering'[77]. In contemporary usage, tinkering means attempting to repair, modify, or improve something in an experimental, unplanned way. It often suggests playful trial−and−error rather rather than precise engineering. It is a foundational practice in the 'Maker Movement', which blends craftsmanship, digital fabrication, open-source collaboration, and traditional skills and presents a shift from the isolated hobbyist activity to a community of makers.

This thread can be expanded even to the term 'Mothering'—a term related to the topic of care. Much of written history does not deal with the most important topics that were essential for our survival—such as motherhood and care for children, without which no kings could rule. The term is now frequently applied in ways that divorce it from tradi-

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[76] Wilfred Lipp, "The Great Repair." ARCH+ Journal for Architecture and Urbanism. Leipzig: ARCH+/ Spector Books, 2023, 3.

[77] The word "tinker" originally referred (from the late 14th century) to itinerant metalworkers who repaired pots and pans—often traveling craftspeople with a minor reputation in society. Over time, "tinker" also came to mean someone who repairs or experiments with objects roughly or adaptively. https://www.etymonline.com/word/tinker?utm_source=chatgpt.com

tional gender roles or biological maternity, to include: caregiving, emotional labor and nurturing. In this sense 'mothering' is connected to the notion of craft.

AMATEURISM

Craft—and particularly amateur craft—is often positioned as the unprivileged "other". Yet, as Glenn Adamson argues, it is the very marginalization of craft that has paradoxically allowed it to sustain alternative values: attentiveness, patience, and sincerity. In this way, amateur craft inhabits an outside space where different ways of knowing and working exist. The amateur operates beyond the established "rules" of professional practice.

This marginality was consciously embraced by feminist artists of the 1960s and 1970s. They recognized that the very materials and processes historically dismissed as "amateur" or "domestic" carried political potential. "Amateurism became a middle ground through which women artists could articulate the very difficulty of their position." [...] "... Feminists conceived of amateurism as a strategy that held both the traditional home and the mainstream art world at arm's length. Craft was the most material expression of that strategy.[78]" By reclaiming media such as embroidery, quilting, and weaving, feminist artists redefined domestic craft as a site of empowerment and critique. Their work questioned hierarchies of gender and labor, asserting that the personal and the handmade were also political.[79] Therefore feminism provides an indispensable perspective for thinking about craft. Its critique of patriarchal systems, and its adoption of craft language, provides a way for reinterpreting history and for envisioning a more just and inclusive future.

In the early 2000s, the politicization of craft reemerged with a new term: 'craftivism'. Coined by Betsy Greer in 2003, the term refers to "a way of looking at life where voicing opinions through creativity makes your voice stronger, your compassion deeper, and

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[78] Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 151.

[79] Important book on this topic is *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984) by Rozsika Parker.

your quest for justice more infinite.[80]" Craftivism often defies clear definition, moving fluidly between art, craft, design, and activism. Practitioners use hand-making to address social issues, combining traditional techniques with new technologies, digital networks, and public interventions. Craftivism departs from luxury craft objects and professionalized studio craft practice. Its focus lies in participation, message, and shared experience. Craftivist practice aligns with DIY culture and counterculture reinforcing craft's social and ethical dimensions. Making can be a form of resistance and way to reclaim agency.

On the other hand, amateurism and craft are connected to hardship. A kind of craft emerges as a natural strategy under conditions of hardship, continually reappearing even where it has been forgotten. The hardship characteristic of the socialist economies of the socialist period in Eastern Europe[81] led to a persistent undersupply of goods and, consequently, to distinct social and imaginative effects. It trained people to live with limits, to make do, and to innovate within constraint: for example, by extending the life of objects far beyond their expected use and by establishing networks of mutual help or barter.

[80] Betsy Greer, "Craftivism: An Introduction," *the thread* (Fabrics Store blog), Accessed September 28, 2025, https://blog.fabrics-store.com/2015/05/15/craftivism-introduction/

[81] This phenomenon is called shortage economy (in Hungarian language: hiánygazdaság).

Part 3.

3.3: Making and Thinking

The discussion around craft has long been shaped by the relationship between making and thinking. The division between making and thinking, and the body (or hand) and mind, is one of Western society's most enduring conceptions. This separation was solidified through René Descartes's mind–body dualism and his Cartesian philosophy, which framed the mind as immaterial, rational, and superior, while the body was understood as mechanical and subordinate. This conceptual divide continued to shape the ways in which modern societies valued and organized knowledge, education, and work. Craft, however, resists such divisions. It embodies both making and thinking while uniting bodily skill with intellectual engagement, material intelligence, and intuitive insight in varying degrees and diverse forms. This view, once marginal, has in recent decades become increasingly recognized as significant. Scholars and theorists have begun to acknowledge the centrality of craft to cultural innovation and human agency, accompanied by a broader reconsideration of the value of tacit knowledge. As the contemporary world moves toward post-industrial and digital realms, craft has, for some, re-emerged as an alternative system of values rooted in human scale and sensibility, and in (re)connection of humans and nature.

In 2008, sociologist Richard Sennett, drawing on ethnographic and anthropological methods, published *The Craftsman*, a book which was immediately acclaimed. Through his study of work and modern capitalism, Sennett explored how industrial and post-industrial systems have eroded the meaning and dignity of labor. He observed that work had become "a privatized domain in which the emphasis was no longer on doing work well," but rather on doing it efficiently, resulting in a widespread loss of autonomy and care[82]. This realization led him to approach craft and craftsmanship as models of meaningful work, rooted in the "enduring human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its

[82] This, once again, echoes the main concerts of the Arts and Crafts movement.

own sake.[83]" He argued that the essence of craft lies in the relationship between the hand and the head. Sennett's leitmotif "*making is thinking*," encapsulates craft as both a practical and an intellectual endeavor. Glenn Adamson further developed this perspective, emphasizing that making itself constitutes a form of thinking—one that cannot be fully captured in language or theory. Craft is not simply the production of physical objects, but the enactment of a cognitive, emotional, and sensory dialogue between maker, material, and world.

The history of institutions reveals how the separation between making and thinking became established. When the South Kensington Museum (today's Victoria and Albert Museum) was founded in the mid-nineteenth century, it collected both textiles and the looms that produced them. By the early twentieth century, however, these categories were split: the textiles remained in what became the decorative arts museum, while the looms were transferred across the street to the newly established Science Museum. This reorganization exemplifies the broader tendency that divided making from thinking, aesthetics from technology, art from work, and creativity from production, all of which were imposed upon the general understanding and treatment of craft.

Craft is not reducible to physical production, nor separable from intellectual and cultural work and meaning. It is a practice that mediates between human beings, materials, and the natural world. As we, the contemporary artists, designers, and theorists grapple with increasingly complex conditions of technology and dematerialization, craft persists as a vital site for reimagining the unity of making and thinking, and for interdisciplinarity.

One of the most distinctive features of craft is its reliance on tacit knowledge: the kind of knowing that cannot be fully articulated or translated into words. A craftsperson "knows how" to do something through experience, repetition, and bodily memory rather than through explicit instruction. As Richard Sennett observes in *The Craftsman*, "craftwork establishes a realm of skill and knowledge perhaps beyond human verbal capacities to explain; [...] language is not an adequate 'mirror-tool' for the physical

[83] Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

movements of the human body.[84]" In other words, the intelligence of the hand-mind exceeds what language can describe. This may mean that craft possesses a special kind of knowledge and understanding, very distinct from the outputs of artificial intelligence (AI), which operates through codified language models, data, and algorithms. Craft is a form of intelligence that is intuitive and responsive. In this sense, craft counters the abstraction and disembodiment of digital systems. It reaffirms the human capacity for attention, empathy, and care, qualities that remain beyond the reach of AI. One may wonder, then, is craft an antidote or counterbalance to AI?

Sennett argues that "the craftsman represents the special human condition of being engaged[85]," a condition in which thought and action are inseparable. Craft contains tacit knowledge and intuition alongside conscious reasoning. Not refusing the digital realms either, Sennett goes further in his evaluation of craft by arguing that craft is also a collective endeavor, and that Linux, the open source computer operating system, "is a public craft." The rise of digital culture has extended the earlier craft theory, and many scholars now embrace the "digital hand" as continuation of the human hand through digital tools, situated within a larger process of deskilling and reskilling. In 1997, a faux manifesto titled "Digital Artisans Manifesto" by Richard Barbrook and Pit Schultz reflected the optimism of 1990s digital culture, claiming: "Without our animating presence, information technology would just be inert metal, plastic and silicon. Nothing can happen inside cyberspace without our creative labour. [...] We will shape the new information technologies in our own interest. [...] We will transform the machines of domination into the technologies of liberation.[86]"

This kind of techno-utopians passionately believed that by promoting free software and open-source content as new kinds of tools, they could create a new, fairer world. Their goal was to create a more equitable and better society, actively addressing the imbalances and perceived errors of both poorly executed socialism and post-industrial capitalism. Much of that early optimism has since faded, eroded by the corporate monopolization of digital infrastructures by a few mega-companies accumulating capital and ex-

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[84] Sennett, The Craftsman.

[85] Sennett, The Craftsman, 20.

[86] Digital Artisans Manifesto. European Digital Artisans Network." In *The Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson, 317. Oxford: Berg, 2010.

ploiting planetary resources. But the dialogue between craft and technology has persisted. It has given rise to new notions of "post-craft," which seek to reconcile material making with digital processes and to redefine the meaning of skilled and engaged work.

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The following section, presented in the form of a lexicon, continues the "Making and Thinking" part of the thesis by reexamining the foundational components of craft from a contemporary perspective.

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LEXICON / Part 2:

TOOLS

Building on the interrelation between making and thinking, or of body and mind, emerges another essential aspect of craft: tools—that is, tools and machines. Craft is almost always a process between the maker, tool, and material. This brings us to another important distinction when thinking about craft: the one between humans and machines (tools).

The first tool was the hand. It mediates between ideas and material, transforming abstract thought into physical action. Scholars such as Juhani Pallasmaa have emphasized that the hand is not merely an instrument of execution but an organ of thought. The "praxic hand," as he calls it, is intertwined with cognition: through tools, the hand becomes an extension of the mind, and through making, thought takes form. Each new tool, however simple, expands the reach of the human body and imagination. Tool-making has influenced human thought, shaping how humans interpret and transform both

the world and themselves. The theorists Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley present this process as a question of design: "The human becomes human in seeing itself in the things it makes, or seeing its possibility in those things. So the human doesn't simply invent tools. Tools invent the human.[87]" In this view, tools and objects are not merely products of human invention—they invent the human in return. Each act of design reshapes the way we perceive and inhabit the world, but also what we are. Today, tools, machines, and design have expanded into every layer of existence. As Colomina and Wigley observe, "we literally live inside design. [...] Even the planet itself has been completely encrusted by design as a geological layer. There is no longer an outside to the world of design.[88]" Yet this omnipresence also exposes a paradox: while design promises control and improvement, it increasingly distances humans from the material and sensory realities of making. "The human is permanently suspended between being the cause and the effect, between designing living systems and being designed by them. What is human in the end is neither the designer nor the artifacts but their interdependency.[89]" As Victor Papanek wrote, "All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity." Now the question is not whether we design, but how—and toward what ends. Design is implicated in weapons, surveillance, and terrorism. Is craft, then, confined within this process, or can it still present a possibility for action and change? Does craft retain an agency to design differently?

> "The human might be the only species to have systematically designed its own extinction, and seems to be getting close to accomplishing the goal. Yet it largely acts as if it cannot do anything about it, staring at the prospect of its own demise as if transfixed, even with a lingering sense of pride in this massive self-destructive accomplishment. It is as if the image of a vast sublime natural world overwhelming the human attempt to comprehend it has been reversed. The human itself is now the overwhelming spectacle.[90]"

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[87] Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley. *Are We Human? Notes on an Archaeology of Design*. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016/2022., 51.

[88] Colomina and Wigley, *Are We Human?*, 12.

[89] Colomina and Wigley, *Are We Human?*, 56-57.

[90] Colomina and Wigley, *Are We Human?*, 15.

SKILLS

Skill is one of the defining components of craft. It is usually—and often too narrowly—understood as manual ability: the capacity of the hand to shape and manipulate material with precision. In traditional craft contexts, skill develops through repetition and bodily engagement, emerging not in isolation but through collaboration and exchange. Learning in craft has always been communal, rooted in the workshop through shared experience and the immediate feedback of materials.

Far from being a fixed category, skill is a living, adaptive process that evolves in relation to technology and culture—whether manual or digital, individual or collective. Richard Sennett notes that "modern society is really, ironically, de-skilling people from many of the competences they need to deal with a very complex world." As individuals lose a sense of capability in managing their own circumstances, they also lose confidence, autonomy, and openness—becoming increasingly vulnerable to dependency and alienation, which in turn can lead to fear and radicalism.

In recent decades, the discourse around skill has expanded beyond manual dexterity to include cognitive, social, and digital capacities. Further, contemporary time emphasizes the cultivation of the so-called "soft" skills—e.g. collaboration and adaptability—as essential for navigating a technology-driven economy. Yet such an approach often detaches the concept of skill (and people) from the material and embodied realities of making and living.

The ongoing process of skill, deskilling, and reskilling continues in the context of automation and artificial intelligence. Software and robotics increasingly perform tasks once reserved for skilled humans, even as new forms of human expertise, such as coding and data handling, emerge. However, a pressing question is: Who are the skilled workers of today really? Who and where are the people whose labor sustains the material infrastructures of daily life—and what is their reality? Despite the crucial nature of their work to a functioning society, their reality is often characterized by economic vulnerability and difficult working conditions.

MATERIALS

Craft's connection to materials is obvious, and its connection to the immaterial is also addressed throughout the thesis. The question of materials is highly complex and exceeds the limits of this lexicon. From the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages to our present age of plastics[91], we can speak not only about how materials are used, but also about how our use of materials is now permanently altering our planet's ecosystems, with pollution being the greatest problem. Another important topic is the ownership and distribution of materials, particularly natural resources.

COLLECTIVE

"Craft is not primarily an individual experience but a collective one," as Rafael Cardoso observes, this was what the Arts and Crafts reformers hoped to recover when they elevated craftsmanship to a social principle—"a community of producers, not consumers."[92] Their ideal, modeled on medieval guilds, envisioned work grounded in shared skill, mutual dependence, and moral purpose.

This collective ethos stands in sharp contrast to the modernist myth of the individual genius—the belief that innovation emerges solely from solitary, exceptional creators. Modern history has long privileged rupture over continuity, celebrating those who overthrow tradition in pursuit of novelty. By contrast, craft values accumulation and repetition. Its innovation grows from continuity, from gestures repeated and refined over time, by countless participants. In this sense, contemporary forms of collective making found in open-source and digital culture resonate with craft. The free software movement and hacker ethics embody a cooperative spirit akin to that of pre-industrial workshops.

Yet the broader social fabric that once supported such cooperation has weakened. Contemporary life often isolates rather than connects, eroding empathy, solidarity, and reciprocity. The ethos of craft, with emphasis on shared making, mutual learning, and

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[91] The development of the earliest plastics coincided with the Industrial Revolution. It began in the second half of the nineteenth century, continued through the invention of Bakelite in 1907, and led to the mass production of plastics starting around the 1950s. Plastic enables us to produce items that would be impossible to manufacture from other materials.

[92] Rafael Cardoso, "Craft versus Design: Moving beyond a Tired Dichotomy," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 329.

collective responsibility—offers a counter-model. Because society, like craft itself, depends on trust and collaboration.

> "For craft to survive in the face of overt consumerism, however, it must embrace the legacy of its own origin: community and shared interaction.[93]"

POST-CRAFT

Craft's claims of enduring authenticity and anti-consumerism are in question. It is increasingly difficult to speak about craft, and not sound outdated. A new term, 'post-craft' is in use. But are we ready for it? What does it actually mean?

The transition toward a post-craft state is characterized by several key shifts. The strict disciplinary lines have largely dissolved. Makers now operate across hybrid territories—between the digital and the physical, the handmade and the automated, the individual and the networked. As we enter what is often called the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the craftsperson increasingly works within a 'networked digital ecosystem', in which the relationship between maker, tool, and material is mediated by software, data, and machines.

Post-craft confronts the reality that with many acts of making, a new form of extractivism is underway: "one that reaches into the furthest corners of the biosphere and the deepest layers of human cognitive and affective being.[94]", as Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler reveal in the essay "*Anatomy of an AI System"*. They further warn that machine learning systems make narrow, normative, and error-laden assumptions about human life, embedding them into infrastructures that shape how opportunities, wealth, and knowledge are distributed.

Still, there might remain some choice within this frightening condition. The task is to decide which forms of making we align ourselves with and which kind of knowledges and intelligences we want to cultivate.

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[93] Cardoso, Craft versus Design, 330.

[94] Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, Anatomy of an AI System (2018), accessed September 9, 2025, https://anatomyof.ai/

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IMAGES

The images presented here serve as supplementary illustrations and were gathered during the development of this thesis. Some are directly referenced in the text, while others are drawn from a broader collection of images that correspond to themes explored in the dissertation but are not explicitly cited.

01. Neolithic spoons made of animal bones for feeding babies
Photo: M. Miljević-Đajić, © Sve o arheologiji

02–03. Koki Tanaka, a pottery produced by five potters at once (silent attempt), 2013,
Stills from the video.
Link to the video: https://vimeo.com/66657885, Accessed 12 September, 2025

04–05. Simon Starling, Shedboatshed (Mobile Architecture No. 2), 2005,
Wooden shed, 390 x 600 x 340 cm, Installation view and production still

06. A treasured wedding platter (Egy megbecsült lakodalmas tál) 2016
The models for Katalin Balassa's drawings, made with great empathy, are objects used by poor people. The models and “portraits" (drawings) were presented in an exhibition at Első Magyar Látványtár Kiállítóházában – Tapolca-Diszel.
https://latvanytar.com/megbecsult-targyak-balassa-katalin-rajzaival-0

07. Michael Rakowitz: *May the obdurate foe not be in good health*, 2011-ongoing
Arabic newspapers, food packaging, cardboard, museum labels
May the obdurate foe not be in good health considers missing and at-risk Syrian artifacts since the country’s 2011 civil war.
https://www.michaelrakowitz.com/may-the-obdurate-foe-not-be-in-good-health

08. Jeremy Deller, *English Magic / We Sit Starving Amidst our Gold*, 2013, Mural
https://www.jeremydeller.org/EnglishMagic/EnglishMagic.php
09. Grayson Perry, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, 2011
The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman is a sculpture of an iron ship, sailing into the afterlife. The ship is hung with hand-made replicas of British Museum objects, representing crafts made through history – by forgotten men and women – which have survived into the present day.

10. Utopia Thomas More (1516), Bibliothèque Nationale de France
This is the woodcut for Utopia's map as it appears in Thomas More's Utopia printed by Dirk Martens in december 1516 (the first edition).
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utopia#/media/File:Thomas_More_Utopia_1516_VTOPIAE_INSVLAE_-FIGVRA_(Biblioth%C3%A8que_Nationale_de_France).jpg

11. Illustration of Emerson's transparent eyeball metaphor in "Nature" by Christopher Pearse Cranch, ca. 1836-1838.
The transparent eyeball is a philosophical metaphor originated by American transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his essay *Nature*, the metaphor stands for a view of life that is absorbent rather than reflective, and therefore takes in all that nature has to offer without bias or contradiction. Emerson intends that the individual become one with nature, and the manner of the transparent eyeball is an approach to achieving it.

12. Victor Papanek
Illustration from his book: Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change.

13. Utopia. Written by Sir Thomas More. [Translated by Ralph Robinson, Revised by F.S. Ellis]. Foreword by William Morris. Printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press, Hammersmith, Middlesex, 1893. https://www.zvab.com/Utopia-Written-Sir-Thomas-More-Translated/31980318360/bd

14–15. Buckminster Fuller at Black Mountain College
From the Black Mountain College Research Project Papers, Visual Materials, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/albums/72157628404581953/

16. Sculpture conjugale
Hans Arp (1886–1966), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943)
Foto: Alex Delfanne - Stiftung Arp e. V., Berlin/Rolandswerth, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025

17. Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Head. 1937. Wood. Height: 38.9 cm), diam.: 9.7 cm.

18. Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Head. Beaded bag. c. 1918

19. Series of punch cards on the Jacquard hand loom in the Textiles Gallery at the Science and Industry Museum. Science Museum Group Collection.
Jacquard's invention transformed patterned cloth production, but it also represented a revolution in human-machine interaction in its use of binary code—either punched hole or no punched hole—to instruct a machine (the loom) to carry out an automated process (weaving).
The Jacquard loom is often considered a predecessor to modern computing because its interchangeable punch cards inspired the design of early computers.
The Jacquard mechanism's influence extends far beyond its initial textile applications. It paved the way for the development of computer programming and data processing, as using punched cards to control a sequence of operations laid the groundwork for early computers.

20. Pattern books containing samples of Jacquard woven fabrics, around 1840.
Science Museum Group Collection
https://www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/jacquard-loom

21. Gandhi and His Spinning Wheel.
Margaret Bourke-White—The LIFE Picture Collection/Shutterstock
https://www.life.com/people/gandhi-and-his-spinning-wheel-the-story-behind-an-iconic-photo/
"I do regard spinning and weaving as a necessary part of any national system of education."
"only through imparting education through crafts can India stand before the world''.
(1947, Mahatma Gandhi)

22. "A Garland for May Day 1895" woodcut by Walter Crane
In 1895, May Day in England was a fascinating blend of two very different traditions: the ancient pagan festival celebrating spring and the new, politically charged International Workers' Day. It was a point of transition. The old, pastoral traditions coexisted with a new, radical political meaning, creating a day that was both a folk festival and a powerful statement of working-class solidarity.

23. May Morris, Honeysuckle
https://wmgallery.org.uk/object/honeysuckle-wallpaper/

24. William Morriss, The Acanthus design of 1875
https://theartssociety.org/arts-news-features/become-instant-expert-william-morriss-beautiful-wallpapers?utm_source=chatgpt.com
Morris's patterns of the later 1870s were more stately and several featured the luxuriantly curving leaves of the acanthus plant. Acanthus was the first of a series of large-scale, densely patterned and richly coloured wallpapers. It used two layers of closely interweaving and overlapping leaves to emphasise the vigour of the scrolling acanthus forms. Originally designed for the Speaker's House in the Palace of Westminster, the pattern required 30 blocks to print and was the most expensive of the company's wallpapers.

25. Cannon. (Saint-Lys) Fauconneau de 1589
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannon#/media/File:(Saint-Lys)_Fauconneau_de_1589.jpg

26. Hiwa K, The Bell Project, 2007-2015. https://kow-berlin.com/artists/hiwa-k
It is a story of metamorphosis, of the logistics of war and of supply chains that have nothing to do with consumer goods that is told in the two films making up Hiwa K's video installation Nazhad and The Bell Making. For the work, the Berlin-based artist returned to his roots in northern Iraq. One element of the two-channel video installation is a twenty-five-minute film about the Kurdish entrepreneur Nazhad who melts down scrap metal in northeastern Iraq to sell it in standard form all over the world. He acquires the raw material for his business from the remains of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and both Gulf Wars (1991, 2003), most of which comes from the United States, Germany, Italy, China, Japan, and Russia. Parallel to this, a thirty-five-minute film on the production of a bell in a workshop in northern Italy is also shown. The camera follows several men as they cast the bell from the material that comes from Nazhad's smelting operation. History is turned on its head. For centuries, church bells were melted down over and over again to make cannons whenever metal became scarce and material losses were great. The dichotomies of war and peace, of the holy and profane, of East and West are revealed. Logistics stands in the middle, neither point A nor point B. It makes the export of war possible and must now live with the crime of complicity.
Source: https://werkleitz.de/en/the-bell-project

27. Hiwa K, The Bell Project, 2007-2015.https://museum-abteiberg.de/exhibitions/2021-hiwa-k/?lang=en

28. Kader Attial, Chaos + Repair = Universe, 2014
Sculpture, mirror fragments, metal wires
The wounds of a world injured by colonialism and capitalism are deepened by the climate crisis. Kader Attia's sculpture shows us a broken world, a damaged planet that is held together by repairs. ("The Great Repair." *ARCH+ Journal for Architecture and Urbanism*. Leipzig: ARCH+/Spector Books, 2023)

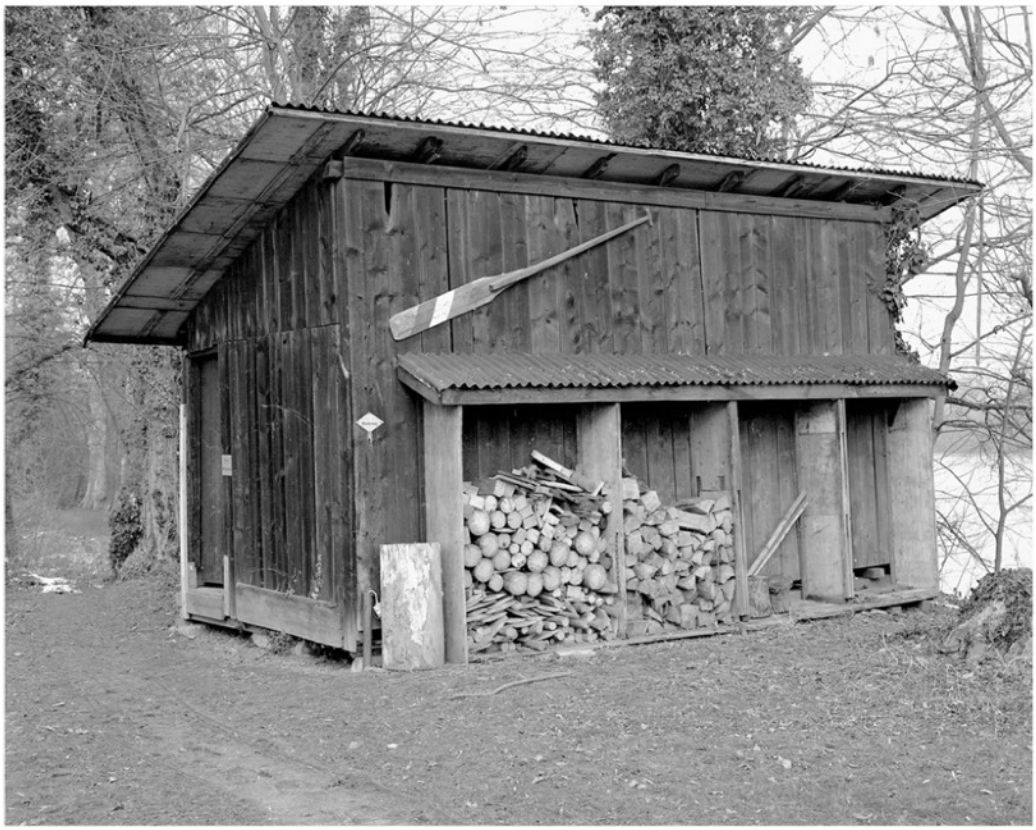
29. Cueva de las Manos, Perito Moreno, Argentina.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave_painting#/media/File:SantaCruz-CuevaManos-P2210651b.jpg

01.

02.

03.

04.



05.

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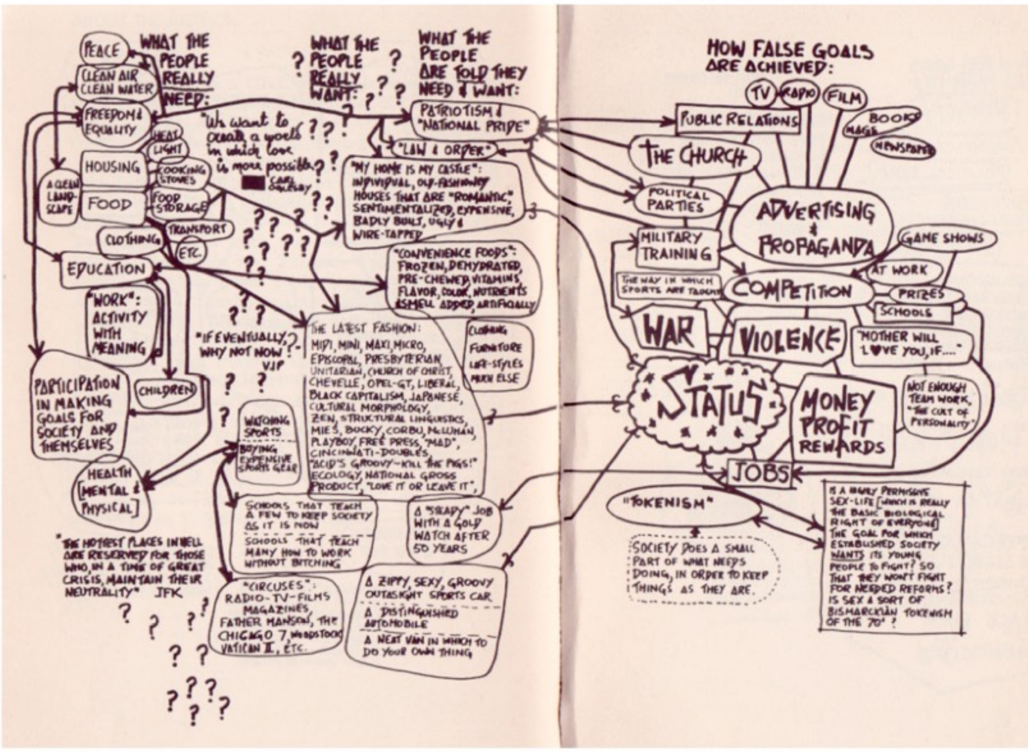
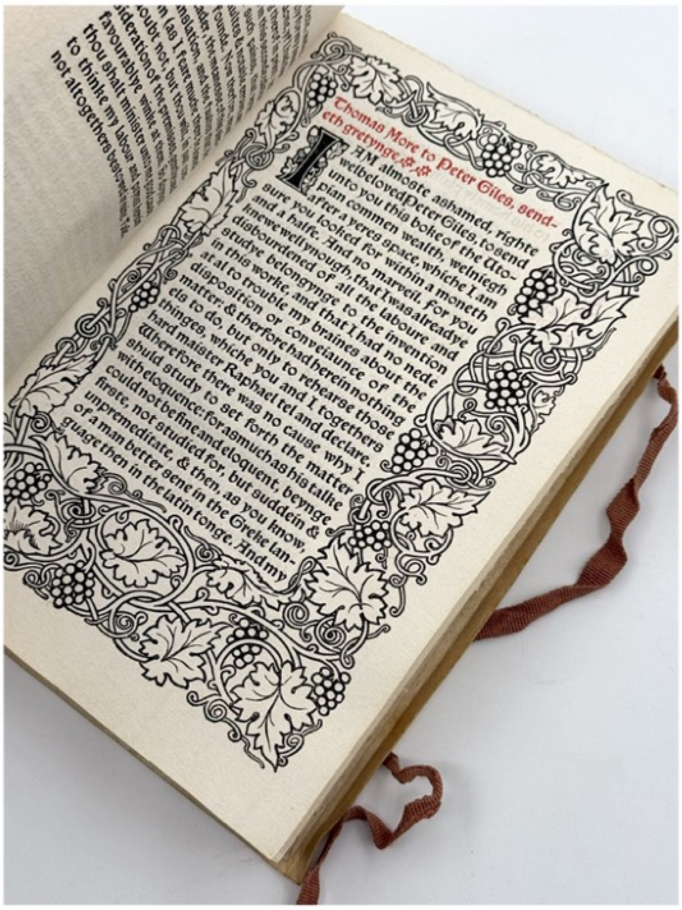
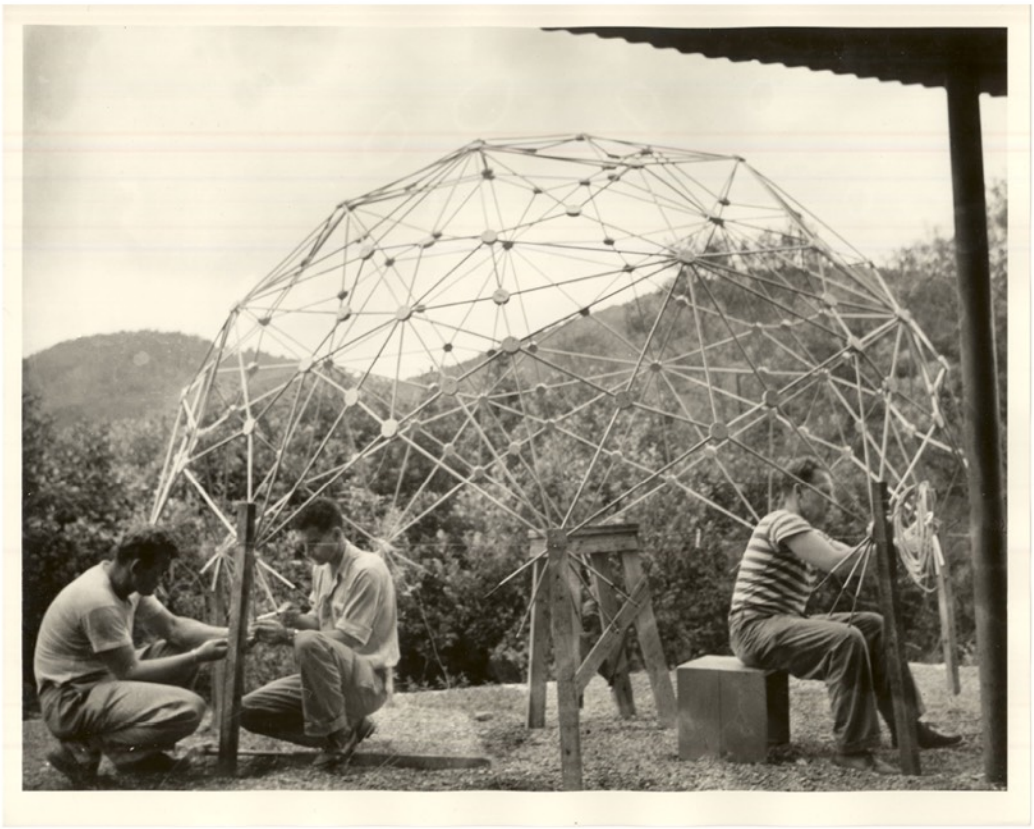

WHAT THE PEOPLE REALLY NEED:
PEACE
CLEAN AIR CLEAN WATER
FREEDOM & EQUALITY
HOUSING
FOOD
A CLEAN LANDSCAPE
HEAT LIGHT
COOKING STOVES
FOOD STORAGE
TRANSPORT
CLOTHING
ETC.
EDUCATION
"WORK": ACTIVITY WITH MEANING
CHILDREN
PARTICIPATION IN MAKING GOALS FOR SOCIETY AND THEMSELVES
HEALTH [MENTAL & PHYSICAL]
"We want to create a world in which love is more possible."
"THE HOTTEST PLACES IN HELL ARE RESERVED FOR THOSE WHO, IN A TIME OF GREAT CRISIS, MAINTAIN THEIR NEUTRALITY" JFK
WHAT THE PEOPLE REALLY WANT:
WHAT THE PEOPLE ARE TOLD THEY NEED & WANT:
PATRIOTISM & "NATIONAL PRIDE"
"LAW & ORDER"
"MY HOME IS MY CASTLE": INDIVIDUAL, OLD-FASHIONED HOUSES THAT ARE "ROMANTIC", SENTIMENTALIZED, EXPENSIVE, BADLY BUILT, UGLY & WIRE-TAPPED
"CONVENIENCE FOODS": FROZEN, DEHYDRATED, PRE-CHEWED, VITAMINS, FLAVOR, COLOR, NUTRIENTS & SMELL ADDED ARTIFICIALLY
"IF EVENTUALLY, WHY NOT NOW?" VIP
THE LATEST FASHION:
WATCHING SPORTS
BUYING EXPENSIVE SPORTS GEAR
SCHOOLS THAT TEACH A FEW TO KEEP SOCIETY AS IT IS NOW
SCHOOLS THAT TEACH MANY HOW TO WORK WITHOUT BITCHING
A "GROOVY" JOB WITH A GOLD WATCH AFTER 50 YEARS
"CIRCUSES": RADIO-TV-FILMS MAGAZINES, FATHER MANSON, THE CHICAGO 7, WOODSTOCK, VATICAN II, ETC.
A ZIPPY, SEXY, GROOVY OUTASIGHT SPORTS CAR
A DISTINGUISHED AUTOMOBILE
A NEAT VAN IN WHICH TO DO YOUR OWN THING
HOW FALSE GOALS ARE ACHIEVED:
TV
RADIO
FILM
BOOKS
MAGS
NEWSPAPERS
PUBLIC RELATIONS
THE CHURCH
POLITICAL PARTIES
ADVERTISING & PROPAGANDA
MILITARY TRAINING
THE WAY IN WHICH SPORTS ARE TAUGHT
COMPETITION
GAME SHOWS
AT WORK
PRIZES
SCHOOLS
WAR
VIOLENCE
"MOTHER WILL LOVE YOU, IF...."
STATUS
MONEY PROFIT REWARDS
NOT ENOUGH TEAM WORK, "THE CULT OF PERSONALITY"
JOBS
"TOKENISM"
SOCIETY DOES A SMALL PART OF WHAT NEEDS DOING, IN ORDER TO KEEP THINGS AS THEY ARE.

12.


Thomas More to Peter Giles, sendeth gretynge.

13.

14.



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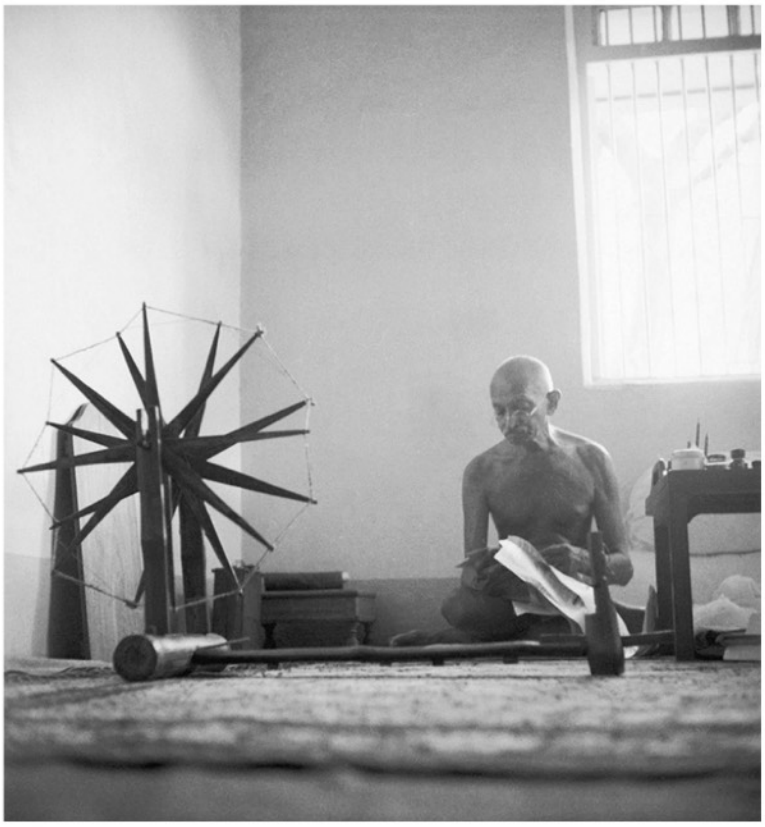

21.

22.

·A·GARLAND·FOR·MAY·DAY·1895·
·DEDICATED·TO·THE·WORKERS·BY·WALTER·CRANE·

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Summary

This thesis is the outcome of my artistic and speculative research, initiated by my artwork ‘News from Nowhere’ and a subsequent period of exhibiting it in various locations and contexts, in parallel with a process of artistic self-examination and engagement with contemporary art discourse. It emerged from the need to understand how artistic practice can respond to larger ideological, historical, and ethical questions that continue to shape our present.

I came to William Morris out of a desire to learn more about the intersection of art and early socialist thought, and how artists originally responded to the emergence of new ideological conceptions that still shape our time. Morris attracted me because of his multifaceted practice—poet, designer, writer, entrepreneur, and activist—and because the way he approached craft was, in itself, philosophical. Reading *News from Nowhere* led me to address craft as a conceptual framework for my own artistic practice, one that gathers together my diverse interests at the intersection of art, society, and design. My practice may not be “crafty” in the traditional sense, but it incorporates values associated with craft: collaboration, attention to material, and social purpose.

The title ‘A Paraphrase of Craft’ was chosen deliberately, to suggest the need to rethink what craft is and how it can be understood today. Craft is a multifaceted phenomenon with no stable or universally accepted definition; it changes across cultures, histories, and communities.

Craft, I argue, is not merely a historical or material category but a mode of understanding the world—an epistemology grounded in making. The thesis does not seek to oppose earlier understandings but to extend them, moving toward a more holistic conception of craft as a universal human capacity.

In modern times, craft has often been marginalized—seen as backward, decorative, or intellectually inferior to art. Yet this supposed inferiority is a cultural construction, not an inherent quality. Recent years have witnessed a modest but growing reconsideration of craft’s value, particularly in response to industrial production, global capitalism, and ecological crisis. Craft is being reimagined as a site of alternative social values and as a means of ethical reflection.

The thesis also revisits the long-standing division between art and craft. Historically, the two shared common ground but were later separated by economic, institutional, and philosophical hierarchies.

The thesis situates craft in relation to utopian imagination. From the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement to contemporary debates on sustainability and social justice, craft has served as a vehicle for envisioning better ways of living. Craft, art, and design share a utopian dimension: each reflects how societies define virtue, care, and responsibility. In this light, craft is not only a method of shaping materials but also a principle of being in society—a practice that unites moral purpose with practical activity.

However, this study avoids idealizing craft as inherently ethical. Like any form of work, it can serve both constructive and destructive ends.

Ultimately, ‘A Paraphrase of Craft’ proposes that craft stands as a mediator between nature, society, and technology—as a human-scaled practice that resists rigid divisions and reaffirms the link between material and ethical imagination. Through this lens, craft becomes both a metaphor and a method for repair, connection, and collective responsibility.

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Hungarian University of Fine Arts Doctoral School

A Paraphrase of Craft

Masterworks:

News from Nowhere

Stummer Diener

News from Home

Katarina Šević

My DLA Masterwork is based on three interconnected artworks. These artworks complement the arguments and observations of my DLA dissertation and reflect my ongoing engagement with its central themes. I chose to present an ensemble rather than a single piece, as this group of works traces the development of my artistic practice in relation to the content of the thesis. Each piece is shaped by my own background and connected to the dissertation's central concern—the understanding and role of craft in relation to art and the social imaginary. Nevertheless, each piece approaches this theme from a specific aspect.

The topic of craft is extremely multifaceted. Both the dissertation and my Masterwork address it primarily in a contemplative way. Presented here are three sets of objects that explore the thin line between craft, art, and design. While retaining a visual resemblance to designed and functional objects, they subvert their original purposes and operate as objects for contemplation.

News from Nowhere
ongoing work
Series of objects, wood, dimensions variable

As a point of departure, this evolving series of objects revolves around the role of craft in contemporary society. Although rarely addressed in critical theory or recognized as central to ideology, craft nonetheless carries significant political and economic dimensions. It remains present in the materialization of ideologies and in initiatives for social change.
The title of the work refers to William Morris's visionary novel *News from Nowhere*, published in the 1890s, which presents a utopian vision shaped by early socialist thought and the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement.
The objects appear at once mundane and somehow estranged, hovering between familiarity and loss in our practical memory. This work also investigates associative and narrative aspects of defunct symbols and collective memory, while playing with the idea

that such forms may not be entirely gone. These objects might present possible future models of forms out of use—or the prospect of their future reconstruction.

Each object is hand-crafted in wood, stained, and polished. The surface of the objects resembles the varnish of the nineteenth-century handcrafted furniture, but their forms are associated with a broad range of objects and symbols. Dimensions range from small objects (approximately 20 × 25 × 30 cm) to larger individual pieces. Together, exhibited always in a different arrangement, they form a constellation of memories and future constructs.

News from Nowhere
installation view, “And Berlin will always need you”, Gropius Bau, Berlin, 2019

News from Nowhere
Object

News from Nowhere
Object

News from Nowhere
Object

Stummer Diener

Installation in collaboration with Gergely László, 2013-2014

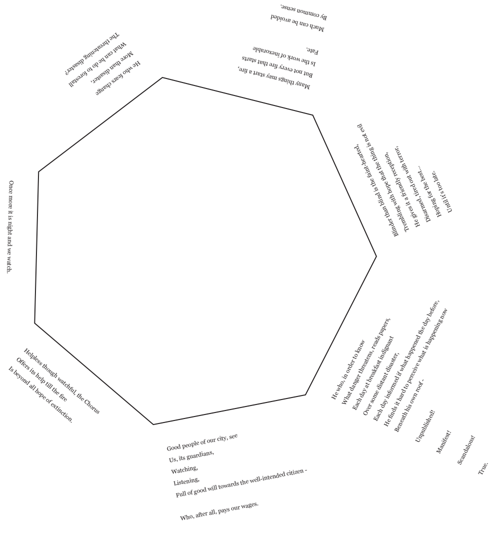
Object (wood), text, performance prop, performance, video

The title of the installation, *Stummer Diener*, comes from the German name for a furniture type popular in middle-class homes during the Biedermeier period. It recalls a style, a way of life, and a general mood that emerged from the wealth of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Though equivalents existed in England, France, and Scandinavia, the term Biedermeier refers specifically to the style of the Central European region under Germanic influence at the time. It remains a cultural trace fundamental to the shared identity of these countries today.

Stummer Diener is a paraphrase of the original furniture piece, reconfigured as an installation for books and performance. It was designed and executed with precise references to the original style and materials—maple wood, veneer placement, stain tones, and joints. It is at once an art object and a device for continuous performative act.

The installation draws on Max Frisch's 1958 drama *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (The Fire Raisers). The performance incorporates seven selected admonitions spoken by the fireman: a choral voice that anticipates disaster, able to warn and to extinguish, but not to prevent. Visitors to the exhibition stand in a circle around the object and ritually read the marked passages from the books repeatedly.

The installation consists of one object (Stummer Diener) and seven books of Frisch's drama with highlighted quotations. The performance is recorded and edited as a video.



Stummer Diener
Object,150x90x90cm, 7 books, placed on the object, video and a performance

Previous page:
Stummer Diener performance script

Stummer Diener
Still from the video
Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=md9dbyT1Y_c

News from Home

Roof tiles (Tageszeitungen, napilapok, dnevne novine), 2025

Installation, newspaper, roof batten

This work is built from the overwhelming flood of news that pours into individuals from the outside world—a torrent almost impossible to absorb in either scale or content. For those living abroad, this experience is especially acute: news consumption becomes a way to maintain an illusion of belonging, yet the information itself is often incomprehensible, exceeding the limits of human perception. From this noisy, relentless, and dehumanized flow of information, I worked with newspapers from across the political spectrum—German, Hungarian, and Serbian—transforming them back into something of a human scale. The piece is as much about the process of making as it is about the material itself, both mental (the abundance of information) and physical (paper). The newspapers were processed by hand: cut, crumpled, "digested," turned into pulp, and formed into roof tiles shaped on the artist's own thigh.

The act of reshaping becomes a quiet act of repair—a reconstruction from the ruins of language and the excess of information. By shaping the tiles on the thigh, the body is

reasserted as a site of comprehension. The work returns the overwhelming abstraction of global news to the human scale, reestablishing the body as a measure of meaning. In this way, the piece engages both language and craft: it translates news events into a tangible form through the making of new material and through the symbolic image of the paper roof tile—a meditation on the fragility of belonging.

News from Home
installation view, “These Walls Are Not Here To Defend Us”, OFF Biennale Budapest, 2025

A sketch of the tile-making process on a thigh
(pencil, notebook)

News from Home
Details (installation)

News from Home
Details (installation)