the promise of making

by

Julian Higuerey Núñez

A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

Katharine Mulherin Contemporary Art Projects, 1086 Queen St.

West, April 23rd to May 6th

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 2012

Copyright Notice

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I authorize OCAD University to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

I further authorize OCAD University to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Signature 

the promise of making

Master of Fine Arts 2012

Julian Higuerey Núñez

Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design

OCAD University

Abstract

“The promise of making” is a research project that investigates the validity of traditional notions of craft in our contemporary society, and examines how these notions are understood through the lens of consumption in a knowledge driven economy. The project simultaneously engages in a theoretical revision of craft, and undertakes a case study that interrogates the processes of learning the required skills to attempt to manufacture a pair of jeans from scratch. Through the reading of theory of craft, contemporary economic models and affects, I will first establish a framework for developing ideas of a reconfigured concept of craft. By examining the behaviours in these contemporary practices –and their relationship to the act of making– I will analyze how the optimism regarding access to knowledge, as well as the nostalgia for hand making perpetrate the illusion of a genuine and sincere craft.

Acknowledgments

This research is partly supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and OCAD University.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the help of my supervisor Dr. Michael Prokopow for every discussions, his patience, confidence and support, specially at times when I most needed it; as well as my committee members Dr. Caroline Langill and Professor Dorie Millerson for their invaluable feedback and expertise. Special thanks to the Graduate Studies office, Gale Allen, Sarah Hildebrandt and Allison Rowe for their constant support (and candy), and to IAMD Program Director Dr. Barbara Rauch for her assistance and understanding.

Thanks to Professor Johanna Householder and Angelo Pedari for their ever-present care and support and for being my proxy family. Thanks to Erica Brisson for providing extraordinary insight at times of crisis, helping me stay on track, and reminding me of what truly matters. Thanks to Britt Wray for the countless hours of kitchen discussion, for her academic poignancy and most of all for listening. Thanks to Zach Pearl for his antagonist critical views and his reassuring critiques, for accepting my crazy ideas and for being there. Thanks to Julia Mensink for the laughs, the sweets, the dances and the commas. Thanks to Keith Cole for being Keith Cole. Thanks to Mark Losier for his early feedback. Thanks to all my cohort for the good times and the bad times, to Rita for being my elder and wiser sister, to David for knowing better, to Ben for being kind and nervous, to Christine for being grounded, to Susan for being rational, Po for being true, Phil and Rebecca for being constant, Anya for being crazy, Fareena for being decided, Nermin for being hip and Pedro for being skeptical. Thanks to Joe Clemment, Barr Gilmore, Genevieve Maltais, and Lisa Visser you were role models. Thanks to the people at Fibre Studio at OCAD University for allowing me to use their space and putting up with my irrational projects.

Thanks to Astrid Bastin for believing in me, and giving me a space in her project. Thanks to Oficina #1 for their long distance trust. Thanks to Juan Pablo Garza, Ivan Candeo and Ignacio Perez Perez for being easy.

Finally, thanks to my family for their unquestioning support.

This is a product of collective discussion as channeled through my stubbornness, so thanks to everyone who has in any way contributed to it, this would have been impossible without you.

To those that still believe

Table of Contents

Prologue.

In the summer of 2009, while engaged in a discussion about the history of the transnational corporate giant General Electric, I came to the realization that, as entities, corporations occupy a large number of roles within the system of producing single objects. The number of activities carried out by a single 'individual' identity multiplies almost endlessly as the number of products it produces increases. From simply looking around me, I could conclude that between 1990 and 2010, General Electric had produced light bulbs, telephones and fridges, but also engaged in obtaining or refining the materials for the manufacture of filaments, screws, tubes, racks and other parts required to assemble those 'bigger' products. While some of these stages of manufacture are no doubt outsourced, they are still part of the corporation's labour because of vertical integration.

The making of any commodity in an industrial setting is quite a large enterprise, and yet, we still take them for granted as they are, for the most part, easily accessible in retail shops or online. I realized that the figure of the corporation was a sort of contemporary renaissance being. For even if a corporation's apparent motivation is geared towards the manufacture of consumer goods —as a revenue generator— the amount of research and development conducted by this very same corporation has led in recent years to the continuous progress of our society —mostly in technological developments.

What struck me, however, was the confluence of all of these activities under a single name and identity, especially in contrast to modernism's push for the specialization of labour in individuals. And because the etymology of the word corporation is the Latin "corporatus" meaning to form into one body, it became apparent that engaging in specific

ways of commercial making, proposed a pre-industrial alternative to contemporary paradigms of knowledge.

The idea of a single person undertaking every stage of production appealed immensely to me —especially at a point in my practice in which performativity and labour were my main theoretical interests. The idea of re-counting an attempt at accounting for every step in the making of an object that also conveyed the labour put into it also seemed like an excellent opportunity for experimenting with storytelling and narratives. At the same time, the project offered an opportunity to explore my interests in value and work. Such was the beginning of the project.

Through engaging with practices of making I found myself in a larger discussion of craft, economy, and their affects. And while the intention of generating documents that successfully tell this story has always been a concern of the project, negotiating the difference between the practice of making something and its recorded history has proven to be quite a challenge. In addition, I found that most of the processes and their documentation happened on multiple planes of engagement and that the main area of exploration existed within critical theory. The text that I am presenting is a compilation of my readings and ideas on how a culturally significant artifact —blue jeans— and the process of their making —through a mixture of obsolete, hopeful practices and hyper-contemporary acknowledgement of production— can trigger discussions on the social role of making and consuming. I hope this will resonate and encourage a rethinking of contemporary biases regarding these particular practices [of making], and that this exercise in immaterial labour can be understood as more than a piece of scholarly writing. The following text is a framework for making, thinking and surviving in late capitalism.

"…Where do you even find scratch in 2011? I thought we ran out of scratch like in the 60's after the Vietnam war…"

Hennessy Youngman[1]

Myself Incorporated (a museum).

Towards the end of 2010 I decided to make a pair of jeans. The elegant way ideas of value, labour and artisan process intersected in the making of such an object also reflected the ubiquitous nature of the everyday, the political history of manufacture, and the traditions of making primitive products. In a way, it encompassed human history through making —trades and guilds, the revolution of industrialization and the consumer society in which we arrived after mechanization. It was, no doubt, an ambitious project, but one that seemed plausible based on access to information, materials and technology. I conducted extensive research about cotton, and found technical data that informed the creation of an equation for how many cotton plants one would need to grow in order to produce a pair of jeans successfully. Growing cotton indoors —and in a northern climate zone— was quite a challenge. Dedication on my part was required, and yet, this

[1] Youngman, Hennesy. 2011. "ART THOUGHTZ: How to Make an Art." *You Tube*. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVFasyCvEOg&lr=1.

agricultural enterprise was a particularly slow one. Even though I had to oversee the humidity levels five to six times a day, I still had a lot of surplus time.

Finding myself with all this free time, I decided to focus on reading theory. I started building a vocabulary of craft, and noticed its rigidity. In traditional terms, it lacked the flexibility to accept some of my own interests —like the idea of agriculture as a practice of craft. This led me to think of an expanded field of craft. Eventually, I arrived at Richard Sennett and his ideas of craftsmanship (Sennett 2008). His elaborations, however, relied too much on the notion of making, and because I was more interested in the products of craft, I started thinking about new categories within the larger field of craft. My discussions on the subject often differentiated between 'traditional crafts,' craft-like activities, or contemporary survival forms —an extension of Rissati's instinct of craft that will be later discussed (Rissati 2007). It was logical then to create a language to aid in theorizing my practice.

The terminology that I am proposing serves the purpose of clearly positioning this discussion in a contemporary craft discourse; it will be particularly useful to make my case on the timeliness of craft and will be used from now on within this thesis paper.

Using simply "craft," I will refer to a traditional understanding of crafts; disciplines rooted in tradition that can fulfill at least one of Risatti's demands: to contain, support, cover or ornament (ibid., 32-37). Crafts are functional, scaled to human size, and possess the materiality that we are used to expecting when we talk about crafts (ceramics, fibre, wood, metal, and so on). Craft will, therefore, remain in that problematic zone that is often separated from fine arts and dismissed as inferior: a category that lives in the in-between-ness of not quite being a thing but belonging to many.

In contrast, "craftesque" names a series of activities that, while not necessarily belonging to tradition, engage in a material approach to making that resembles practices of craft. What this means practically is that products of the craftesque do not need to

contain, support, cover or ornament, but that they are, to a degree, functional and scaled to human size, the result of processes that possess some form of tradition or knowledge, and that require a level of mastery by the producer to yield successful results. Examples of the craftesque can be found in activities as diverse as programming, singing, and archival research. Craftesque is close to Sennett's ideas, but excludes craft as its own distinct category.

Finally, "craftical" will be the contemporary process of improving survival. It refers to a fundamentally social practice of earning, consuming, and adorning, and its relationship with the forms of display of these activities. Craftical is the equivalent of a contemporary instinct for survival if social norms are taken into account. It assumes that the system in which we live provides the manufacture of the objects that satisfy our physiological needs and that survival lays in obtaining access to them in a way that becomes socially relevant. The craftical is, therefore, related to the attachments people feel towards objects of desire, and their attempts to fulfill these attachments.

It is necessary to frame the act of making in specific/distinct ways when —at their core— they suppose different activities and modes of engagement with material culture and exchange. In order to expand the understanding of the new terminology, I will provide examples of each of them within the process of jeans-making. The weaving of denim is an act of craft. Weaving has always been understood within the tradition of craft, and even when it serves the purpose of becoming cloth, a utilitarian object, its tradition is historically bound. Sewing, on the other hand, is a craftesque. The assemblage of clothes is closer to fashion design, although the boundary is blurry —and some things like sweaters enter more easily into craft because of their materiality. The transcendence of the covering function of the object into the aesthetic realm of form-fitting, illusion-making and material manipulation propose a gap with tradition, objects begin to be value as things other than their use. Buying (or designing) the jeans that will enhance the

appearance of my body is an act that is craftical in nature. It takes into consideration the social function of the jeans, and therefore the quality and making of the jeans takes a secondary role, and becomes relevant only if these details provide status. It obeys canons of goodness that are not tied to the process of manufacture as traditionally understood. Instead, the value is placed on the ability of the garment to communicate certain social codes.

These distinctions propose a mode of differentiation that is fundamentally grounded in historic modes of production. Understood historically and ideologically, craft is a pre-industrial activity. The notion of the craftesque follows an industrial model, —and I would specifically argue a Fordist model of production of goods— one that has been modified in an arguably humane way. Craftical engages in specific modes of immaterial production that are better understood in post-Fordist economies.

Returning to the idea of making jeans as a practice, I had been taking care of the plants and reading craft theory. By mid summer, the cotton had reached what I considered to be its full size. It was past their expected picking time; however, the plants were thin and their yield was underwhelming. Being concerned mostly with labour, I was convinced that the effort to grow cotton, despite the adversity, had been performed properly. If the cultivated cotton was not enough for weaving denim, outsourcing from external producers was not an issue —theoretically, more plants and a better setup could have produced the proper yield, even if that would have meant an inefficient operation in terms of costs and resources. I turned to the market and purchased raw cotton —the state equivalent to that being picked from the plant.[2] This decision signified the transition

[2] I must admit that it took me a while to embrace these ideas. Given my involvement with the project as craftesque in nature, I felt a sense of failure, as well as a sense of shame for believing that knowledge equaled mastery. I considered using my cotton only in the making of very small, doll-like pants, or even lying about the origin of the cotton and faking my success at agriculture. The realization, however, that the growing of cotton, with all of its technicalities, was most likely the least demanding of the steps that I had still to undertake, made me think. More traditional crafts —like spinning or weaving— have always been understood as activities that require mastering. Having never engaged in such practices —as well as the intellectual understanding that

from a craftesque practice into craftical one, from being engaged in specialized forms of labour and into post-Fordist consumption as means of production.

The necessity of resorting to outsourcing as a means of production in coping with the failures of traditional manufacture suggested two things. The first one was that as an exercise in the craftesque, this experiment could be read only as an apprenticeship —or the beginning of an engagement with the craftesque. For just like craft, it required the perfecting of skill in order to achieve success. The second one was that the goal of the project was the manufacture of blue jeans "from scratch," and that claiming mastery over the processes required for such production was not in the scope of the project. This issue was significant in a larger context. The measure of the material "veracity" as well as the point from which "scratch" was being defined became focal points of value. The understanding of a craftical strategy of engagement as a necessary response to the resolution of the project conflicted with the notion of authenticity that was expected from it as an engagement with craft.

The shift in strategies also signified a turning point in the project, as it required me to rethink the role of the craftesque —and perhaps more importantly that of craft— in a contemporary setting. Rissatti's idea of the physiological need was enlightening, but it was Marazzi's idea of lean production —a minimalistic approach to labour use— that helped shape a model of craft production that aims at economical making (Marazzi 2011, 20).[3] Adapting post-Fordism to craft practices meant displacing the skills required to perform making from the physical into the intellectual and communicational realms. The craftical maker is the equivalent of a director, shaping ideas of manufacturing processes and communicating them to the producers.

---

using cotton in such crafts adds a layer of difficulty to the processes— meant that if I were to succeed in having a pair of trousers made, I had to embrace consumption as part of my methodology and practice.

[3] Marazzi proposes that in post-Fordism, production happens in a regulatory fashion in which all excess labour or machinery is trimmed down. Because craft is so labour dependent, imposing such a model of production upon it can only mean contracting processes of making instead of engaging in them.

Embracing the craftical as the practice that I was performing meant reframing the project to accurately depict my engagement with modes of production. It also meant re-negotiating my role within it. Because I failed to produce jeans from scratch and resorted to strategies of outsourcing through consuming, potentially, I could have walked to Queen St. West in Downtown Toronto, found the better fitting pair of jeans, and acquired them as a craftical gesture. Why then, would I continue a frustrating attempt to produce each stage of labour, even when they were almost all guaranteed to fail?

In turning my gaze back to craft, and specifically to the recent writings on the amateur and craftivism, I understood that what was driving me was not an exclusive whim, but rather a response to a collective state of feeling towards contemporaneity. I began a search for critical writings regarding people's engagement in practices of craft — more often than not without a leading desire for the mastery of the skill— and their motivations. I came across mainly highly naïve propositions. Most accounts for engaging with craft, either as a hobby, as a way of sustaining oneself or as a political statement were rooted in past craft discourses. Almost all propositions on the subject suggested a nostalgia for "a better past", traceable to Ruskin and Morris, or to the feminist rescuing of domestic craft as a subversive act. Despite these deeply idealistic reasonings, the very same practices are understandably immersed in capitalistic modes of exchange. Alternative craft fairs —an increasingly popular phenomena for craft networking and commerce— are above all marketplaces, and a book like Handmade Nation, despite claiming to portray a generation of capitalist-fighting makers, functions as a catalog to find the best —more authentic— alternative craft in the United States and points the reader to the markets where these products can be acquired (Buszek 2012).

Little critical writing has been done on the contemporary search for the authentic as an ideal that is mediated by the idea of hand making. Adamson briefly discusses it as an exercise in creativity that is embedded with extra value when opposed to consumables

(Adamson 2007, 140). Considerations that acknowledge the shift to post-Fordism and immaterial labour are rarely proposed, which make it hard to understand why anyone would invest any time in a craftical practice, that pursues craft as anything other than fashion. As Michael Raisanen argues, the idea of authenticity can now be recognized as a trend, and brands have assumed this idea of "nostalgia for a time when things were 'real'" (Raisanen 2012), as an aesthetic. By embracing inauthentic authenticity as a prestigious choice, companies like J. Crew (through Barbour) or Ralph Lauren (through Denim & Company) provide their customers —a class of mostly immaterial workers— with an aesthetic of "resistance" by means of post-Fordism, or a consumer experience that points towards an appreciation of craftsmanship even if this craftsmanship is not "authentic."

This scenario is described by Adamson as one of false consciousness. However, I see it differently and I would argue instead for the use of optimism, using Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism in the context of an attachment to nostalgia. Unlike false consciousness, proposing a relationship of optimism avoids the problematic of awareness. As Raisanen points out, it is okay to be fake (ibid.). Optimism examines the belief that the contradiction between ideas of making and means of production can be overcome. Consuming pre-manufactured products does not have to be a fake yet unconscious experience of authenticity; degrees of authenticity can be accepted however impossible this may seem. These degrees of authenticity become happy instances. They signal —in the case of craft— some skill and have many social implications as discussed earlier: free time, economic power, and so on. They also become an aesthetic in themselves, and it is in that promise that we generate attachments. People feel good by buying "artisanal" products instead of mass manufactured goods (Levine 2009), so even in consuming these manufactured-through-consumption objects, relationships of attachment form. The cruelty of this is that the processes perpetuate privilege —the

craftical over the craft— and in this sense the relative ease of "making" threatens a complete loss of skill in the field, because it reinforces the notion that we can always resort to buying these authentic experiences. As Berlant points out, "our sense of reciprocity with the world as it appears, our sense of what a person should do and expect, our sense of who we are as a continuous scene of action, shape what becomes our visceral intuition about how to manage living" (Berlant 2011, 52). If we cannot escape these attachments —for they are too invested in the world as we understand it— the idea of a craftical understanding of making makes a lot of sense as an analog for Risatti's physiological needs —maybe rethinking it as a psycho-physiological or socio-physiological need instead.

In this sense, when I undertook the process of jean making through the craftical —and in pursit of a nostalgic craft— I engaged in a discussion about the value of material production in post-Fordist economies, and situated myself in the middle of a Marxist and a post-structuralist discussion about it. In Christopher Tilley's terms, I stand in between positioning the value of the process in its engagement with material resources, labour, production and consumption, and its relationship to cognition and symbolization, or as a tool for thought (Tilley 2005, 9). I made jeans. They stand in for the process of their making, failing to be craft and reviewing labour, materiality and exchange in terms of crafticality. They also stand in for a new craft, for post-Fordism as a strategy, and for survival in contemporaneity. These jeans are a statement; they also fit me well.

Skill without imagination is craftsmanship and gives us many useful objects such as wickerwork picnic baskets. Imagination without skill gives us modern art!

Tom Stoppard[4]

The narratives of craft.

To talk about craft is almost certainly to engage in a problematic discussion. What exactly is being discussed is never entirely clear. As a word, craft exists in different forms and In different fields. Craft can be a discipline, a field of scholarship or a way to encapsulate certain types of hobbies; it can be art, functional or decorative; it can be a form of resistance or the ultimate form of compliance. Almost everything can be seen as a form of craft. It is precisely because of this multitude that craft is such a rich field for scholarship; it is interdisciplinary in and of itself and so unstable that conversations on craft are often unpredictable. Craft simultaneously occupies academia, guilds, hobbies, alternative and popular cultures.

One of the more common discussions in craft is its proper place within a modern[5] understanding of disciplines.[6] Numerous attempts have been made to assimilate the hard to define craft into art, design and material culture, none of them being particularly successful. The reason for this, I would argue, is that craft's identity lay in the in-between of these newer disciplines —because it is a less specific field. Its awkwardness —even if uncomfortable for post enlightenment modes of knowledge organization— is essential in its constitution. The lack of a strong support for theories of craft that push these ideas perpetuate its need for a disciplinary place.

In his Theory of Craft, Edward Risatti argues that there is no distinction between

[4] Stoppard, Tom. 1988. *Artist Descending a Staircase : a Play*. New York: S. French.
[5] Historically the words *technē* and *ars* were used as categories that embraced a larger set of disciplines in relationship to either their reliance on hand dexterity or practical knowledge (Risatti 2007, 211-212)
[6] Specifically in the context of modern institutions a resistance to acknowledging craft as an independent category seems to exist and is often evidenced in its grouping with fine arts or design.

fine arts and craft (Risatti 2007, 12); furthermore, he suggests that it is possible to think of a fine craft when the binary function-aesthetic is broken into a gradient of possibilities (ibid. 243). Glen Adamson further elaborates on this point by illustrating the shift in craft education towards a conceptual approach that purposely denies technical prowess in order to accentuate the thinking behind it (Adamson 2008, 36-41). Since its introduction in 2008, the term "sloppy craft" has become a common handicap in all craft discussions, and its simultaneous appearance with the recent rise in amateur craft presents a difficulty in understanding it properly. Adamson himself has written about the amateur in craft, and summarizes it as an uncritical practice of false consciousness (Adamson 2007, 139). If understood this way, the amateur is the absolute opposite of the sloppy, both from a technical and a conceptual perspective. Sloppy craft denies its technical proficiency as a way to engage with narratives of purpose, while the amateur thrives for perfection renouncing anything but functionality in its attempt to overcome clumsiness. High craft can be seen as moving towards a craft for craft's sake, and this implies a commodification of practice, despite it traditionally being ground in functionality. At the same time, craft's recent engagement with social and community practices, craftivism[7] movements, and amateur practices are on the rise, and while preaching craft as a strategy of communication and empowerment, it also repositions craft as a discipline — and more often than not as a privilege inducing/denouncing one.

Despite this apparent difficulty in encapsulating craft, all discussions on the subject recognize —either by accepting or denying— four key issues in any form of the definition of craft: the role of the hand, utility, materiality and mastery (Milgram 2012). It is also important to recognize that these categories, while not directly treated as such, have been theorized in contemporary criticism. Richard Sennett and his book The Craftsman,

[7] Betsy Greer defines craftivism in the Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice as: "the practice of engaged creativity, especially regarding political or social causes" "Craftivism." Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice. 2007. SAGE Publications.

for instance, address the role of the hand —which he expands to any form of "laboratory" production— and of mastery, which he addresses as skill (2008, 20) in an accepting way that can admit almost any discipline. Computer programming, for instance, requires a form of physical engagement —often mediated by computers— and lots of "training" to become properly acquainted with the technology and its manipulation. For Sennett, craftsmanship ends up being skillful, allowing engagement with a tactile world and its making.

Different as it may appear, the premise behind much of the indie craft, DIY movement and hobby craft is not far from Sennett's propositions. Faythe Levine and Courtney Heimerl's discussion in Handmade Nation paints a heroic picture of creative types. The largely female group of alternative crafters (Levine and Heimerl 2008, X) presents itself as resisting consumerism by engaging in practices of handicraft. Thus, with entirely different preoccupations than those of Sennett's examples, the aesthetic of arts and crafts practices[8] partly respond to an intention of "proper" hand making —or skill. It is not difficult to trace the origin of such practices —particularly in their discourses of resistance— to the 1970's feminist movements and the recourse to craft as a form of protest.[9] The most celebrated of these 'craft as protest' examples is no doubt Judy Chicago's Dinner Party (1979). Long assimilated into the institution, its legacy —beyond

[8] The origin of amateur craft, Adamson points out, is derived from "private affairs from the leisure class at the end of the 19th century" (Adamson 2007, 140).

[9] It would be hard to dismiss the romanticizing tone that the first generation of feminist art enforced on this form of craft revival. At the same time, one can connect these romanticizing discourses with those of Ruskin and Morris and their ideas of resisting the mass-produced goods of industry with the labour of the hand. There seems to be something fundamentally idealistic about siding with unprivileged disciplines in order to propose resistance, and yet in the case of craft, part of the argument for its autonomy —grounded in its "origin" as a leisure activity— is the ability to conduct forms of work that did not intend to generate profit. But the pursuit of the romantic notion of an autonomous production is only part of what motivates the contemporary production of "amateur" craft, it is also a commodity. In the final essay of Handmade Nation Susan Beal quotes Christy Petterson, the co-founder of Indie Craft Experience, saying: "we want people to show up and buy tons of stuff" (Beal 2008, 125). Adamson argues that Morris' ideas are outdated for all craft now is submerged in systems of exchange (2007b, 13). What he fails to recognize, however, is that despite the markets that amateur/activists partake in, the promise that motivates them continues to be one of resisting industry and generating a sense of the authentic by physically engaging with processes. Morris' ideas have been reworked into commodity form; authenticity can now be mass consumed.

Chicago's recognition— is the repositioning of craft from a confined, domestic, privileged position as an activity of surplus into a form of resisting commodification, a community building activity and valuing of 'lesser' work.

Embedded in these discourses is an understanding of craft practices as authentic. What drives this search for the authentic? Risatti's physiological necessity for craft (Risatti 2007, 54) —the idea that throughout human cultures traditionally understood craft objects appear at primitive stages of their development— points to a form of archetypical relationship to nature: one of adaptation, a search for efficiency. I deem this relationship one of improved survival.[10] Human rationale, in understanding its environment, abstracts the materiality that surrounds it and shapes nature into objects that increase its chances for continuing to thrive. This kind of relationship to nature explains the categories that Risatti himself proposes for typologies of craft, containers, covers, supports and ornament (Risatti 2007, 32-37). They universalize human needs to an almost instinctual behavior. From this model of thinking, however, two questions arise: first, do these physiological needs evolve? And second, if this is the case how? The questions can be addressed by examining Risatti's model and his final craft category: ornament. Being present in all of his cases studies, the desire for ornamentation is more a sociological behavior than it is a physiological one. As such, it responds to an understanding beyond function and into forms of exchange, communication and identity. Improved survival in this case can only happen in the context of societal living. In a hypothetical scenario of craft evolution, it is logical to assume that the ornamental category appears at a later point than covers or containers. Taking into consideration this reading of the shift towards the social, if needs for survival evolve, can we trace their

[10] Recognizing that chances of sustaining oneself will increase through the use of objects that can be manufactured means that the manufacturing of such objects situates the maker in an advantageous position — in comparison to a non-manufacturer of such objects. By making craft objects, the artisan literally improves his/her ability to engage with the world.

evolution? And more importantly, perhaps, can we recognize where they are positioned today?

Since the rise of modern industrialization, containers, covers and supports are very rarely manufactured by their final users and instead are mostly consumed as the product of industrial manufacture. While their use is still very much required, the means of survival in this context are closer to the objects' acquisition than it is to their making; ornamentation, on the other hand, continues to exist both in the body and the environment. If we were then to ask how to improve chances of survival in the 21st century in the developed world, consumption and social embellishment might be viable answers, and in a larger context, this means participating in capitalism.[11]

While not discussed in these terms, Pierre Bourdieu's proposition of taste as a form of judgment deeply rooted in class standing can be understood as a contemporary form of craft, in its intrinsical impulse for survival, when understood as a set of socio-economic decisions that lead to status. When in Distinction he proposes:

> The submission to necessity which inclines working-class people to a pragmatic, functionalist 'aesthetic', refusing the gratuity and futility of formal exercises and of every form of art for art's sake, is also the principle of all the choices of daily existence and of an art of living which rejects specifically aesthetic intentions as aberrations (Bourdieu 1984, 376).

The understanding here, is that failing to behave in this way would disturb the performance of bourgeois life. While Bourdieu uses the language of submission and

[11] This is no doubt a simplification of contemporary life. The idea that social positioning can be seen as a form of ornamentation and intelligent consumption can mean different things in different contexts —with overconsumption or wasteful consumption sometimes seen as an aid towards status. Regardless, I would argue that survival —in the most primitive way of keeping oneself alive— is a given today. Systems are in place so that humans (at least in the developed world) have access to food, clothes and shelter through mechanisms of exchange and little physical effort, and even in the circumstances of failing to survive in capitalism, the developing countries welfare system theoretically takes care of providing the basic means of keeping oneself alive. Because of this, our understanding of survival has shifted into successfully interacting with the world —one can think of the classic expression "surviving high school". The social nature of this survival demands the earning capital, the consumption of commodities, and designing ourselves in order to achieve and maintain a specific social status, and to do this in order to progress hierarchically or remain fixed according to our desires. In this sense, for craft to be physiologically prescriptive today, it would have to be engaged in capitalism: owning it and thriving in it.

dominance, reading the situation as a form of adaptation through a developed skill can be seen as another example of Sennett's definition of craftsmanship. Aesthetic decisions are made in understanding the place one occupies in a larger system. It is not the consequences that matter, but the understanding that certain choices will allow for an easier way to succeed. These choices are mediated by a form of social awareness. In his study of middleclass French society, Bourdieu presents countless examples of the habits of consuming fresh versus canned foods, fashion versus multipurpose clothes. Survival is no longer exclusively preservation. It can function as a sustaining effort or as one of excess and waste, as a set of self-imposed austerity measures or as engaging in ways of surplus expenditure towards luxury for the purpose of display. In this context, survival means not only sustaining yourself but also displaying the ease with which this is done.

Despite the craftical, craft continues to exist and thrive. How then, do the old forms of craft relate to this new proposition? The answer is found in the production of luxury. Amateur craft is the consequence of the capitalist expansion's attempt to displace unused time with leisure activities (Adamson 2007, 140), and, therefore, a luxury. Hobbies are encouraged by the market; they represent an outlet for the consumption of goods, but also a symbol of status.[12] If time can be spared from earning the income that would allow for 'survival,' and be put into leisure, it becomes 'survival surplus', because this surplus can be equated to a lack of need, it points to the idea of a better social position and hence should be displayed as such. In this sense, craft is assumed as an aesthetic of excess that can be displayed as a method of social survival.

Luxury, however, exists in a myriad of instances, so why the recent prominence of craft as such? Why choose outdated practices of making as a way to "make" status in

[12] This is historically related to women's work in the 19th century, in which upper class women would be prevented from working as it was seen as an activity unworthy of their attention. To fill their time, all kinds of needlework was expected of proper 'ladies' as it meant they had the amount of surplus time required to master such endeavours.

a new form of survival? Stevens says that the handmade has long been in tension with notions of industrial progress and labour alienation, and that the origins of such an idea can be traced back to the writings of Morris and Ruskin (Stevens 2008, 81). Andrew Wagner makes a similar statement and regards craft as political since the Industrial Revolution because of Ruskin and Morris's writings (Wagner 2008, 1). In explaining big brand names' use of the word craft within advertisement campaigns —Levi's 2010 Craftwork Campaign, for instance— Frayling equates it with labels like 'organic', an added value that communicates an association with a "recent past" that by risk of being lost becomes precious (Frayling 2011, 9).[13] Craft has become an "other" that is embraced as good, as a better-than-the-standard, as conscious of process. Craft shows care and ttention expressed by both producers and consumers because it offers a model of social consumption that places the individual above mass production. It is also affecting because it is thought of in nostalgic terms, a romanticized past.

[13] http://leviscraftwork.com/

I am constantly out there buying things, going to flea markets and yard sales and junk stores

Mark Dion[14]

Consumer systems.

If John Ruskin and William Morris started a craft revolution in thinking and ways making by resisting the mechanization of artisanship at the beginnings of the industrial revolution, it is in the decay of a purely progressive approach to making that craft has become relevant again. And although post-Fordism has been around for some 60 years, it is the crisis of Fordism that makes craft so evident today.

Writing in The Condition of Postmodernity, David Harvey fixes the origin of Fordism to 1914 when Henry Ford set his $5.00 a day wage as an incentive for his factory workers (1990, 125). This bold movement by Ford —the standard wage at the time was roughly half of that— is what made his model revolutionary. By increasing the economic power of his workforce, he was not only efficiently making commodities, he was also creating consumers. The success of the system, however, was not immediate and, as Harvey points out, it took a considerable amount of government intervention to set it up as a standard (ibid., 127). Governments from the western developed countries saw in Fordism a way out of recession.[15] In this sense, Harvey says that Fordism transcended the system of mass production and became instead a way of life (ibid., 135). Fordism meant the standardization of consumption and the embracing of a modern aesthetic of functionality and efficiency that was conducive to capitalism's evolution (ibid., 136).

During the 1950's as a response to the Fordist mode of production, and the impossibility of sustaining such a model in the Japanese context, the Toyota company

[14] PBS. "Mark Dion." *Art21*. http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mark-dion.
[15] As David Harvey explains, Fordism was seen as a way of overcoming 1930s great depression by means of self-help.

proposed the beginnings of post-Fordism. This was also a response to the limited demands of its market and a reduction in the work force as a consequence of government-imposed austerity measurements (Marazzi 2007, 25). What this meant for the company was a detailed plan of production that considered their specific demands and how to meet them with the least amount of effort and waste.

The success of this type of operation meant creating systems of communication that were not only efficient but reliable (ibid., 34). The reliance on information as a fundamental actor in the manufacturing process was counterintuitive to the deskilling propositions of Fordism, but in a context where workers had to assume different roles depending on the demands of the moment, it was essential. As a consequence, it also meant communication started to infiltrate layers of consumption. Over time, and as Keti Chukhrov points out, consumption has fully moved to information and knowledge —the material by-products only reproducing such 'designs'— (Chukhrov 2011, 95). Maurizio Lazzarato, discussing consumption in contemporary post-Fordist models, proposes that the fundamental difference between Fordism and post-Fordism is that the consumer partakes in the manufacturing of the consumable from its conception (Lazzarato 1996, 141). The system no longer supports impulse buyers. Consumers have become "smart", and their demands happen as part of the chain of production. This means a breaking away from the Fordist unification of taste (aesthetics) discussed in the previous chapter —though in terms of class preferences. On-demand demand empowers the consumer — by means of making the consumer's role active in the manufacturing process. On-demand demand proposes a "working" towards consumption, and a form of social relationship in production and consumption —that, according to Lazzarato, is the first and

most important product of immaterial labour (ibid., 138).[16] On a similar tone, Tom Holert reads Hardt's embrace of design as the generic post-Fordist type of production (Holert 2011, 113) as a significant shift in manufacture. "Design cannot be escaped" Holert says, "because it effectively organizes post-Fordist subjectivity, both materially and metaphorically" (ibid., 116). By entering a mode of production that is so dependent on consumer demands, experiences require increasing customization, designer "work" proliferates, and as a consequence, the notions of the immaterial worker and the active consumer in post-Fordism overlap. In an ideal post-Fordist model, all consumption becomes work. Accepting post-Fordism as the framework for contemporary living, the role of the consumer becomes one of craftical engagement. The design of experiences to be consumed is demanded from the individual, and the role of physical labour is understood as secondary.

It is precisely because of this construction that when, for example, talking about fashion conglomerate NIKE as evidence of a post-Fordist enterprise, Chukhrov, citing Gorz, attributes to the company only the design of the products and sometimes their philosophy. NIKE does not own any machinery, and even the company's advertising is conducted by third parties. This does not prevent NIKE from being the sole owner of the branded products that are produced through outsourcing, nor from taking the larger part of the revenues produced by such products (Chukhrov 2011, 97). This example is enlightening in many ways. First, it makes it clear that, in post-Fordist economy, immaterial labour is the only relevant form of labour in value-making. As a consequence, it also makes consumption the relevant factor in value-making. Second, it demonstrates that the outsourcing of physical production is not only acceptable, but the leanest way to engage in manufacturing —and hence ideal. Third, it traces the geographies of the

[16] Lazzarato defines it as the "labour that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity"(Lazzarato 1996, 133). He explains that this type of labour changes what takes place in the worker's processes and assumes diverse activities that are not usually understood as "work" (ibid.).

outsourced labour to the developing third world, in ways that manifest the inequality of exchange terms and the un-sustainability of the project on a global scale. As Chuhkrov notes, “the class of immaterial workers often stands out as an avant-garde of political opposition based on proximity to the postindustrial means of production” (ibid., 102). Unlike the universal promise of Fordism, post-Fordist consumption —and production— can only happen in privilege, therefore, the preached autonomy of the consumer can only be achieved in first world scenarios, while the rest of the world continues to be oppressed by class-imposed senses of taste.

A burgeoning contemporary field of study, post-Fordism has been heavily theorized in recent years in relationship to artistic practices. However, only two aspects of it are essential for my project. First is the reliance on outsourcing as a way of producing, and how this practice can be understood as one of production through consumption. The second one is the idea of immaterial labour and its placing of design as the general category of making that still contains value. Through these two ideas, I will reexamine craft and its potential to be understood as skillful consuming but also as immaterial labour.

You can Save Thousands Of Dollars By Easily Making Your Own High-End Wood Furniture & Other Small Crafts! Find out here.
Facebook Ad[17]

The promise of knowledge.

The democratization of knowledge by means of access to information has always been one of the central arguments that theorists have put forward about building understanding for the purpose of generating alternative systems of value when discussing knowledge economies and Open Source.[18] Communal exercises like Wikipedia have contributed to the idea that the Internet is an ever-growing depository of knowledge. And while most people would dismiss Wikipedia's contents as shallow, the existence of these contents as free and expansive fields of information perpetuate the belief that almost anything can be learned from the Internet.

This belief, however, is not tied to the medium. In discussing George Sturt's The Wheelwright's Shop, [19] Christopher Frayling makes it clear that even during the 19th century, approaching a subject through written knowledge often led to the illusion of being able to execute such knowledge in real life (Frayling 2011, 47). There is, however, a significant difference between knowledge and know-how, and this is what Sturt struggled with for 30 years. He understood that his insistence on decoding and communicating the shop he was running was part of an effort to capture 'the passing of Old England'. Sturt's accounts emphasize how the modernization of the country and the movement towards

[17] Facebook sponsored ads. "thewoodworkingplans.info ad." Accessed March 21, 2012, http://www.facebook.com.
[18] As it is not within the scope of this piece of scholarship and the discussion of these subjects, I will not expand on it, however, an extensive account of the subject can be found in Chopra and Dexter's *Decoding liberation* (2008).
[19] George Sturt was an English writer in the late 19th century. He studied pedagogy and became interested in the subject of craft during this time; at his father's death he inherited a wheelwright shop, which he managed until the end of his own life. During this time he became obsessed with decoding the knowledge of the profession in a way that could be conveyed, but he eventually gave up understanding that craft required a physical engagement. This knowledge came to him by physically learning the traits of the shop. The book the Wheelwright's Shop is an account of this process.

American lifestyles and modern economics was debilitating tradition (ibid., 25). But Sturt abandoned these ideas once engaged with craft on a physical level. His interest had shifted to a knowledge that could not be simplified in scientific terms; he embraced the idea of the 'invisible college' (ibid., 48), and of skill, not knowledge, as the core of craft.

What is key about this account is the expectation that knowledge will grant ability, for as Sturt says: "much of handwork, as intellect can understand, does have that appearance [of simplicity]" (ibid., 38). Understanding how things work gives theoretical access to the processes, and even if these processes cannot be performed, knowledge about them can make them appear easy. I would like to argue that this behavior stems from attachments to the enlightenment's ideals of universal knowledge as an object of desire, and use Laurent Berlant's cruel optimism to look at it critically.

As Berlant notes, every attachment is optimistic, for it promises an encounter with the object of desire (Berlant 2011, 24), however, not all attachments are necessarily 'happy' and they do not necessarily *feel* optimistic. Optimism as an affective form can easily be dismissed as non-optimistic formally, for we usually associate optimism with happiness —on emotional terms— (ibid., 12-13). In the case of "cruel optimism" however, these attachments happen amid conditions in which their realization is impossible or, if possible, toxic (ibid., 24).

In Sturt's case, it is not hard to see that his training in pedagogy —and his admiration for Ruskin and Morrison— set up a framework for a considerably modern approach to knowledge. Modernism is deeply optimistic in principle, as can be exemplified in the embedded promise of "the good life" in "the American Dream", marked by material wellbeing and technological progress. But understanding knowledge in these terms is slightly more difficult. Though enlightenment ideas of knowledge point at their universality —and this is unrealistic at best— regarding this relationship to knowledge as optimistic or cruel is difficult. One's relationships of desire for knowledge are mediated by

imposed attachments that are regulated by social consensus through our shared endurance of the world (ibid., 52). If we accept then that knowledge is a “normal” attachment that we trust in order to maintain the world’s ongoingness, we can recognize it —in modern terms and through ideology theory— as cruelly optimistic.

This is particularly relevant when one considers that any act of craft today happens in the context of knowledge and not of utility. As an example, the manufacture of jeans that I have undertaken addresses demands of knowledge —and luxury— and not clothing per se. If the latter were the motivation, it would be easier to address such concerns through regular systems of exchange. Furthermore, the premise that jeans can be manufactured outside of industrial processes assumes the possibility of sourcing knowledge successfully, and that this knowledge will be conductive to skill. Optimism exists not only in the larger project, but also on the underlining system of acquiring information. There is no substitute for experience, and no tutorial on making jeans from scratch. There is, however, extensive information on jeans, denim, cotton, and craft. Should the access to this information not be sufficient in understanding the inherent processes of making as generators of value?

Say "I do," and your life will never be the same.

Brian Massumi[20]

Making Promises.

This critical and artistic exercise focuses on two distinct aspects of making. The first is the positioning of the handmade within contemporary contexts, and how making in the particular instance of craft is carried out in a society ruled by ideas of immaterial labour and post-Fordism. The second issue is challenging these notions of making by engaging in outdated practices of production that intend to bypass the more direct relationship to object culture that is contemporary consumption.

The approach is necessarily dualistic. On one hand, it is carefully thoughtout and planned. On the other, it is realized. The instances are independent but intrinsically linked. Thinking through theory informs the making, and making informs the thinking through theory. The labour model, however, is fundamentally post-Fordist. Theory sets parameters for physical labour. It functions as a design strategy that dictates the outcomes of production. But because I also conduct the material labour, its practice influences design choices through the production of knowledge. In this sense, physical labour has a component of immaterial labour too —as the process generates information that is used in consecutive iterations of the design process. In this sense, the fundamental materiality —or immateriality— that I work with is knowledge. The studio results are vehicles for communicating these immaterial elaborations.

Assuming post-Fordism as a methodology forces the acknowledgement of immaterial labour's role as the source of value. This is significant because, in the context

[20] Massumi, Brian. 1992. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia : Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

of this thesis project, the role of the "supporting document" has transcended its status as a complement and instead assumed a protagonist's role within my practice. While I recognize that the labour aspect of production is of interest, and I have assumed it as a relevant part of the project, it is also clear that the theoretical shaping of the work has allowed for an engagement in practices of minimal production and to strategies of outsourcing labour. Simultaneously, I recognize that the framework that I have built around "the promise of making" is as important —if not more— than the resulting jeans, not because they illustrate the theory, but rather because they are a study for it. If, as an illustration of post-Fordist ways of making, the project seems rather inefficient, it is because it is designed that way as a result of the privileged position I occupy within the chain of production of commercial goods and my optimistic attempt at coping with this reality.

In pragmatic terms, the immaterial labour that goes into the project needs to be understood, first as a rationalization of the processes of making —which in modern society leads us to believe in the promise of knowledge— and second, as a belief that such knowledge can easily be acquired and practiced through the use of Google[21] and YouTube tutorials. In this way, immaterial labour first happens as a series of engagements with "learning environments" that inform the process of making, and second, as a series of design practices on the implementation of these knowledges. And third, as a series of decisions that guarantee the completion of the project through traditional commercial practices in light of the failure of material labour practices.

Immaterial labour also occurs in a non-immediately engaged stage of production, through the theoretical framing of the process. As I have already stated, an important part

[21] A recent YouTube ad for Google that, unfortunately, has been impossible to track down makes this case. Young professors (of film and video production) are engaging in strategies of networked learning as a means to encourage research —under the premise that new skills can be acquired through knowledge raking. The ad clearly makes a point that skills can be learned through the use of the Internet and access to technology.

of the challenge that is this project is the critical thinking through the issues in which I am engaging in: the discussion of craft, post-Fordism, and optimism within the narratives of making in contemporaneity. And while this kind of thinking undeniably influences the processes of making, it does so only because I am conducting them while being critical of their effectiveness.

The post-Fordist model of the immaterial worker that I am using can be compared to the notion of designer proposed by Holbert, who, quoting Latour, says:

> The concept of design emphasizes the dimension of (manual, technical) abilities, of "skill," which suggest a more cautious and precautionary (not directly tied to making and producing) engagement with problems on an increasingly larger scale. Then, too, design as a practice that engenders meaning and calls for interpretation thus tend to transform objects into things —irreductible to their status as facts or matter, being instead inhabited by causes, issues, and, more generally, semiotic skills (Holert 2011, 124-125).

Post-Fordism takes ideas, knowledge and communication as material, and shapes them into objects that sometimes become physical.

As suggested, the physical manufacture of objects is only important as a consequence of a thinking stage in post-Fordism. The engaging in processes for such a production can be acknowledged as a reflection on the conditions of labour and as a strategy for the communication of this knowledge. Resorting to outsourcing strategies is in no way detrimental to the project as it reflects my inability to cope with certain methods of production. It also illustrates the embracing of consumption as a strategy of survival.

21st Century Crusoe.

In 2008, Thomas Thwaites began what came to be known as “The Toaster Project.” The project was his attempt to replicate the cheapest household electronic appliance from scratch and account for the process. He chose a toaster, and at the end of his journey, published a small run book —that was then re-edited by the Princeton Architectural Press— that narrates his adventures in trying to find and transform the materials he needed in order to accomplish his goal. While at first the project sounds very similar to mine, the careful reading of his project in contrast to my lived experience made it easy to recognize significant differences. The technological fact of the object selected by Thwaites determined the inorganic materiality of the project. This in turn, determined his approach to the gathering of resources (metals, plastic and mica). This materiality also produces a significant distance from ideas of craft; Thwaites’ project revolves around an object with no obviously direct references to historical traditions of making, its modern existence is the result of the utilitarian adaptation of technology’s developments.

The lack of a history of toaster making situates his self-proclaimed “heroism” in the context of what I have previously discussed as the modern promise of knowledge; however, it does so without the mediation of a romantic view of the past and its glory. Thwaites’ optimism does not lie in knowing that toasters have been made in the past, but rather that we have mastered the technology to make toasters. His belief is that deconstructing these processes could theoretically signify the ability to recreate them. The most significant difference, however, might be his reluctance to engage directly with materials providers —post-Fordism. In his account, Thwaites first establishes rules (Thwaites 2011, 38-41) and then breaks them (ibid., 123), and yet his ethics prove very stubborn, to the point of his comparing the collecting of plastics in recycling warehouses to mining (ibid.). The cruel optimism of such a statement is clear. In his attachment to the

idea of “making from scratch” that is signified in the transformation of a material sourced anywhere but material suppliers, Thwaites refuses to accept that he cannot succeed without entering practices of consuming as manufacturing. Thwaites’ heroism is the staging of unskillful labour.

Like Thwaites’ enterprise, my project of making jeans from scratch began as a questionably large task and the belief in my potential to accomplish it. I started by laying down a plan, researching extensively what was required for this production, and doing a lot of math for calculating time and resources. I reached the conclusion that this was a viable project based on reading different experts’ account’s of how much cotton one could grow from a single plant, or the poetics of making indigo dye.[22] The knowledge gathered was, however, compiled by experts, and even “raw” explanations supposed a degree of expertise on my end. Every assumption I made about the process was proven false. I had no experiential understanding of what it meant to grow, gin, card, spin or weave cotton, and my engagement with these ideas was unrealistic. Because it took me the time span of the whole process to understand this reality, I embarked on the challenge very optimistically.

The first thing I did was to determine how much cotton I needed to grow in order to have sufficient yardage, while simultaneously looking at cotton seeds providers. Having determined the total weight of cotton a pair of jeans required, I selected the higher yielding cotton variety I could find in order to have the smallest number of plants possible. This was of great importance as it became clear very early on that I would have to use my own studio space to start the plants —the weather in Toronto was not ideal for cotton growing. Access to any kind of greenhouse was impossible given the timeframe, and the building of a rooftop garden did not seem viable either in the context of my apartment building nor at OCAD University.

[22] As told by Michael Taussig in “Redeeming Indigo” (2008)

I decided on a packet of Rajhans-1 from MRC seeds —the company advertised a yield of 4 lb. of lint for every 25 seeds, and an average of 150 days for full maturity. Most of the other suppliers did not have info sheets for their products. With these seeds —and in ideal conditions— I had to grow 7 plants to get a pound of cotton, which was enough for a very fine pair of denim jeans. The spatial footprint of 8 plants was also about right. I acquired a powerful full spectrum fluorescent lamp,[23] a timer, some specialty pots[24] and appropriate plant food[25] from a local hydroponics supplier.

I looked for indigo suppliers, and found one[26] that could ship the variety *indigosfera tinctoria* in time. I ordered these seeds. I waited for the seeds to arrive.

Once in my studio, I started them in a hydroponic medium —a combination of soil and nutrients designed for germinating seeds.[27] Once sprouted, I transferred the plants/medium to a dish underneath the full spectrum lamp and started watering regularly. It quickly became apparent that the studio air was too dry. I therefore established a schedule for watering twice a day and spraying three to four times a day.

In total, nine plants were grown. Two of them died before reaching a stable size. Each of them was named and progressively transferred to larger containers.[28] I talked to them regularly and included tomato plant food[29] every 4th watering, and Fish Agra[30] every 8th watering. I maintained this routine from mid-January until May 6th when I left for six weeks to take up a thematic residency at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta.

---

[23] While most experts agree that fluorescent artificial lightning is the least desirable for indoor growing, the expense, power consumption and safety concerns made a 6 tube T5 High output fixture the most reasonable lighting alternative for my set up.
[24] After considering a variety of alternatives (hydroponics, aeroponics, regular soil), and their specific application to cotton, I decided to stick to a known result (soil), but attempt to improve growth using high-tech pots that aided nutrient and air circulation of the root system. I acquired Air-pots. http://airpotgarden.com/
[25] As suggested by the storeowner based on cotton's NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) needs.
[26] San Mountain Herbs.com sell indigo seeds year round. They recommend temperatures between 24 and 35 degrees Celsius for germination http://www.sandmountainherbs.com/indigo.html
[27] Following the manufacturer's instructions, I immersed the medium in water until it grew to about 4 times its size, put a single seed in each and stored them in an airtight container in the dark until they sprouted.
[28] The plants were named chronologically: Karl, Emmanuel, Edward, Julia, Karl Jr., Hanna, Gilles, Joan and Walter, while I knew them because of their size, they also had small labels to be identified.
[29] Fox Farm Big bloom was selected for its NPK balance.
[30] Fish Agra was selected to boost the Nitrogen content in the soil.

This forced separation —moving the plants was restrictively expensive— meant the very first acknowledgment of social contracting in the project. Outsourcing labour to water my plants was the most economically efficient means for keeping the "production" of cotton going. Prior to departing for Banff, I built a soft greenhouse inside the studio to help keep humidity levels constant and moved all plants inside[31]. I convinced a friend, the performance artist Keith Cole, to serve as a plant-sitter to the cotton.

Upon my return, I found the plants had grown significantly. However, they were also very dry. I had become emotionally detached from them and went from addressing each by name to being more clinical system of identification. I moved them outside, as frost was no longer a concern. I continued visiting the plants on a weekly basis, but the labour of watering was almost entirely carried out by someone else. Realizing that the cotton that I was growing was not going to be enough, I started looking for a supplier of cotton in the raw form and came across a North Carolina cotton grower and small-scale distributor. I decided to buy cotton in the state in which I would have gotten it from the plants. I also ordered some ginned cotton, understanding that things could go wrong.

In October 2011, I moved the plants back into the studio. They had produced a total of 6 bolls. A very low yield, no doubt. The bolls were quite small and so they became precious objects. I ordered an Indian spinning wheel from a local supplier, together with some pre-carded cotton, just in case. I also managed to get the Fibre Studio from OCAD University to lend me a loom.

When the cotton arrived, I had already bought cotton thread and denim. I decided to engage in each stage, but understood that my success in any of them was unlikely. I ginned and carded 60 grams of cotton over several days. The process was slow and painful, but I succeeded. I tried spinning this cotton with no success. I attempted to weave first as a test and then on the loom and became frustrated at the difficulty of the process

[31] Using wooden dowels to make a house-like structure, and plastic sheeting to contain the air within it.

and the lack of physical rapport I had with the means of instruction, books and YouTube tutorials. I turned to patternmaking. Through an iterative process, I managed to fashion a proper fitting 'maquette' in muslin fabric, and proceeded to cut the pattern in the store-bought denim.

I sew the jeans by hand, increasing the total fabrication time, as a gesture of labour —and as a pointer of luxury. The assemblage of an almost entirely prefabricated object by engaging in a tedious use of needle and thread was, if nothing else, a nod to the origins of the project. The finishes were uneven, and details like the fly were clearly crooked. These imperfections were a sign of my unskillfulness, but pointed to the role of the hand in the process. I disliked these nuances, but assumed that they were as important within the narrative of the project. I finished the "jean look"[32] by making rivets and buttons out of pennies, an illegal act but an effective one non the less.

As a product of my own labour, I hated them. The jeans' handmade nature was evident, but their heavy reliance on economies of material exchange made them fake or inauthentic in my eyes. The understanding of my failing to carry the process from start to finish made me question the result and their validity as any kind of proposition in making. Once again, I turned to the Internet and found a website where by inputting specific body measurements, a custom pair of jeans could be manufactured in India. The website made no claims of making these pants from scratch, but neither could I. I embraced the post-Fordist reality that I had been immersed in for months and ordered a pair of jeans with my measurements and a similar finish to those I'd made from "makeyourownjeans.com". Four weeks later, I received an almost identical pair of jeans in fit, but with perfect detailing. Accompanying the trousers was a letter. The document claimed that the jeans are the product of 70% hand labour, and that my participation was fundamental in the

[32] The use of rivets, while mostly a style decision nowadays, was originally intended to reinforce heavily used work wear. The making of rivets seemed challenging, but YouTube gave me an encouraging tutorial result that made it look fairly simple. I ordered some tools and pre-made rivets —yet another plan b— from a local supplier.

process. Furthermore, because “of the hand techniques used, there may be some un-even effect to these jeans, [but] in fact they add up to the beauty [of the garment]”and because these jeans are manufactured in small numbers by loving craftsmen “they can be termed as luxury.” The letter indirectly point to an assumption of authentic experience of clothing, by means of recognizing both the hand labour and the unique result of this mode of production.

The design of a commoditized critique.

From the start, this thesis work was conceived as a critique of late capitalism. During the making of the jeans, however, I came to realize that the critique could happen only in my failing to achieve my own expectations. By engaging in practices of consuming as making, I realized that it is significantly difficult to bypass the systems of production that are in place, and while not impossible, the degree of mastery required for such a task would make trying to escape any one instance of mass consumption a life project. Regardless, the project demanded that I produce a pair of jeans, and this involved their design. Because of my understanding of the existence of semiotic codes in jean detailing, a few decisions were made to communicate aspects of the project through its material output. The following are a series of explanations about these decisions.

The denim is 100% cotton with an unwashed indigo finish. This was important to reflect the material-labour relationship. It was imperative that the pants' production was unaided, and the "pure" materiality of such denim was a statement of this.

The stitching was made using raw, unbleached cotton thread. While most jeans are sewn with orange thread to accentuate the contrast and to brand certain stitching patterns, I decided on raw white as it symbolized the material pursuit of labour and disengagement with aesthetic conventions. Because all stitching was made by hand, one of the yokes —the right one— was sewn with the lower seam backwards. By visually exposing the imperfections resulting from the hand manufacturing of the trousers, the process of labour becomes evident. Similarly, the pocket stitching was to accentuate the handmade by means of being uneven. An unequal sign was added to the right, back pocket as a "branding" element, referencing the relationship between labour and value in post-Fordist systems of exchange.

Canadian copper pennies were used for the making of rivets and buttons.

Because they are the right size, and directly referenced monetary exchange. The fact that a modern penny is under 5% copper was balanced by the fact that they were readily available in my pockets.

The fit of the trousers met my personal taste and expectations in pants —skinny, low rise with a relaxed crotch. Because over the last five years, I have not worn jeans as I find them unappealing. It was, therefore, important for the project that this pair was made to my liking. In this sense, my expectations were a mix between culture consumption and comfort; jeans should not only look good, but overall, feel good.

Raw canvas would be used for the label. It is a fabric that is virtually the same as muslin, but that as a material is more commonly associated with painting and the artistic gesture. I wanted it to be branded with the unequal sign (≠), but decided to laser cut it as this proved more convenient and a direct gesture of outsourced labour.

While these elements have been realized in the offered jeans, but I recognize that there are potentially a myriad of other decodable signs in them. After the completion of the jeans, and in light of my previous statement about the critical framework as a fundamental aspect of the project, I realized that more than the jeans, the story behind this research was a crucial product of the process. This involved accounting for all the steps, the failures and detours, but also the less obvious aspects of it: the readings that informed the framework, and the framework itself.

The critique that I'm proposing cannot be limited to a single discipline, for it represents the convergence of many trajectories into a single project, it is intrinsically interdisciplinary. It cannot be contained in a medium, for it has been made out of many. It exists as a scholarly exercise, and represents a retelling of manufacturing processes through objects. It is craftical in placing itself as a symbol of status. Maybe craftesque because as a process, the final exhibition turn on a museological premise that the display of objects operate both as evidence and as a didactic. Material express achievement, a

collection of objects like patterns, cotton in different stages, photos and other documents arranged in four display tables throughout the gallery, retell a story. The tables are and separate the project's materiality, processes, consumption strategies and cultural references. An area of the exhibition is reserved for textual contemplation, a sort of reference library to the project; a copy of this document will also be included. A list with all steps that I underwent in the project is also presented. The list is connected to the rest of the objects in space through a numbering system. All furniture on the space —display tables, shelves, and chairs— have been made out of MDF through a process of rapid prototyping, a definite post-Fordist take on more traditional furniture making.

The costumer is always right (craft is the new black).

Through a pseudo-empirical approach, I commenced this thesis work with the intention of making something, in the process I realized that this was impossible given the proposed framework I had initially set. The motivations for the attempt at manufacture laid outside of the completion of a purist version of the object, and through the examination of contemporary means of production, I came to understand the complicity of the projects' goals to consumption, despite my initial understanding of them in antagonistic terms.

In the process, I managed to recognize and craft a niche for the project, not only as a case study for what I have called the craftical, but fundamentally as a motivation for furthering the study of this relationship to making. By combining craft with post-Fordism, I believe the project has opened a door to examine contemporary practices of making both in the academic setting —particularly in material art and design programs— but also outside of it through amateur engagement, where it seems to have the larger presence today. By critiquing not only capitalism but also resistance to it, one can gain knowledge on the intentions of a culture of makers in privileged situations. The attachments to nostalgic visions of the past and its technical prowess fail to be critical of the systems of contemporary production in late capitalism. These attachments have become normalized as aesthetics and have lost the authenticity that proposed them as alternatives; their pursuit is no longer a resisting stance but, rather one of complying.

This, however, opens up a new field of making/understanding. The perspective of social making is exciting as it directly references contemporary live, its aestheticization and study can can lead to a better understanding of our position as consumers in the developed world, and more importantly, to encourage engagement in larger discussions of systems of economical and cultural exchange.

In proposing hand production as an immaterial cultural artifact, the project

functions as a mirror of society. It targets expectations, engagements and submission to the larger schemes of production. It reflects on the culture of making —not only on the global scale, but also in the confined space of contemporary art. It questions notions of authenticity and knowledge, and challenges the optimistic, progressive ideas that, as a society, we function within: upward mobility, the promise of knowledge, and so on.

As an academic exercise, I believe “the promise of making” proposes an original approach to craft theories in contemporaneity. It blurs the differentiation between high and low craft, and instead focuses on the economical and cultural systems by which these activities are engaged. It also offers a preliminary study of the motivations for these crafts within a larger context of the craftical.

While the “practical” component of the study has come to a close, the opened doors in the theoretical proposition of my project could and should be pursued. An extended investigation about the psychological tendency towards the authentic could be explored in more depth by engaging with fields of behavioral psychology. Also, the continuation of the development of a post-Fordist craft theory could potentially align with critical arguments that push towards a more universal understanding of making as a fundamental human activity.

Bibliography.

Adamson, Glenn. “The Spectacle of the Everyday.” In *Out of the Ordinary : Spectacular Craft*, edited by Laurie Britton Newell. London: V&A, 2007.

———. *Thinking Through Craft*. English ed. Oxford ;;New York: Berg, 2007.

———. “When Craft Gets Sloppy.” *Crafts*, no. 211 (2008): 36-41.

Ahmed, Sara. “Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness.” *New Formations*, no. 63 (Winter /2008 2007): 121-138.

Armstrong, Helen Joseph. *Patternmaking for Fashion Design*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education/Prentice Hall, 2010.

Beal, Susan. “Craft Fairs Redux.” In *Handmade Nation : the Rise of DIY, Art, Craft, and Design*, edited by Faythe Levine and Cortney Heimerl, 121-125. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.

Berlant, Lauren Gail. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2011.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction : a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Buszek, Maria Elena. “DIY and Craftivism”. OCAD University, Toronto, Canada, 2012.

Castaneda, Carlos. *The Teachings of Don Juan; a Yaqui Way of Knowledge.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.

Chopra, Samir, and Scott D Dexter. *Decoding Liberation : the Promise of Free and Open Source Software*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Chukhrov, Keti. “Towards the Space of the General: On Labor Beyond Materiality and Immateriality.” In *E-flux Journal : Are You Working Too Much?*, edited by Julieta Aranda, 94-111. Santa Monica: Ram Publications, 2011.

Frayling, Christopher. *On Craftmanship*. London: Oberon, 2011.

Greenhalgh, Paul. *The Persistence of Craft : the Applied Arts Today*. London ;New Brunswick N.J.: A & C Black ;;Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Greer, Betsy. “Craftivism”, 2007. http://sage-ereference.com/abstract/activism/n218.xml.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity : an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990.

Holert, Tom. “Hidden Labor and the Delight of Otherness: Design and Post-Capitalist Politics.” In *E-flux Journal : Are You Working Too Much?*, edited by Julieta Aranda, 111-133. Santa Monica: Ram Publications, 2011.

Lazzarato, Maurizio. “Immaterial Labour.” In *Radical Thought in Italy : a Potential Politics*, edited by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, 132-146. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Marazzi, Christian. *Capital and Affects : the Politics of the Language Economy*. Los Angeles CA: Semiotext(e), 2011.

Massumi, Brian. *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia : Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.

Milgram, Lynne. “In Conversation with Lynne Milgram”, 2012.

PBS. *Mark Dion*, n.d. http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mark-dion.

Raisanen, Michael. “The Current Rage In Branding: Fake Authenticity Is Now A-Okay | Co.Design: Business + Innovation + Design”, n.d. http://www.fastcodesign.com/1669220/the-current-rage-in-branding-fake-authenticity-is-now-a-okay.

Risatti, Howard. *A Theory of Craft : Function and Aesthetic Expression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Stevens, Dennis. “The Paradox of Craft.” *Studio Potter* 36, no. 1 (2008): 80-82.

Stoppard, Tom, Tom Stoppard, Tom Stoppard, and Tom Stoppard. *Artist Descending a Staircase ; & Where Are They Now ? : Two Plays for Radio*. London: Faber and Faber, 1973.

Taussig, Michael. “Redeeming Indigo.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 3 (May 1, 2008): 1 -15.

Thwaites, Thomas. *The Toaster Project : or A Heroic Attempt to Build a Simple Electric Appliance from Scratch*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.

Tilley, Christopher. “Theoretical Perspectives.” In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by Christopher Tilley, 9-12. London [etc.]: SAGE, 2005.

Wagner, Andrew. “Craft: It’s What You Make of It.” In *Handmade Nation : the Rise of DIY, Art, Craft, and Design*, edited by Faythe Levine and Cortney Heimerl, 1-3. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.