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Body, environment and object

An exploration of craft making as interconnected knowledge

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Abstract

This paper explores craft making as an embodied process of knowledge creation. It examines the transmission of material knowledge rooted in the body, the making process and its context. By positioning the craft object as a connector between embodied knowledge and embodied encounter, the dominant frameworks that marginalise nonverbal, slow, process-based knowledge are challenged. This paper argues for the need for new criteria of value grounded in craft's own logic and illustrates the relational nature of craft making, highlighting its role in reconnecting us with our environment through the concept of an ecosystem of making. It proposes that making is both a legitimate mode of inquiry and a form of resistance in the face of ecological crises.

Introduction

The internal, often intangible nature of the knowledge of making is often overlooked. In an increasingly economically orientated world, where our systems of education and production are driven by capitalist ideals, our criteria for value are shifting away from those that underpin craft making. This paper argues that we should be wary of this departure, as a connection to making processes offers us more than just an alternative to mass production. Importantly, it also offers alternative ways of understanding and being in the world.

The paper first introduces the author's position in this debate as a maker and 'insider' with lived experience. The recent project *Things We Can Know* is used as the main study for this discussion, informed by literature that sheds some light on why craft skills are often marginalised in our thinking about knowledge creation. An examination of the relationship between the body and knowing, as well as thinking through making, reveals the unique position of craft making in knowledge creation. The inclusion of objects as sites of knowledge that themselves embody the process of their creation is carefully scrutinised.

This thinking expands knowledge to an ecosystem that not only encompasses mind/body or human/more-than-human but also looks more deeply at things. This expansion of the site of knowledge is discussed in relation to empathy, wholeness and ecological connection. Thus, highlighting craft's role in creating interconnected knowledge can offer a means of resistance to dominant ideologies and reconnect us with a world that is in critical need of empathy.

Situated knowledge: The importance of including the maker's voice

I am writing this paper from my position as a glass maker with experience in production studios and with my own creative artistic practice. I also have a background in academic

research in arts and cultural policy. From this viewpoint, situated at the intersection of practical making and research, I offer insights into the topic of the value of craft knowledge. In this article, I centre my individual lived experience, which Haraway (1988) refers to as 'situated knowledge'. It is not meant as a universal truth but rather the addition of another voice to an ongoing discussion on embodied knowledge. I add this voice from my own position within Western society, which has roots in Cartesian dualism and has entered into a form of late capitalism or neoliberalism with value systems at odds with those of slow making so often found in craft. Recent studies on embodied knowledge in craft and design processes, which seem especially prevalent in Nordic countries (see Aktas, 2020; Groth, 2017; Groth et al., 2024; Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, 2017), serve as the foundation for this study. If we understand situated knowledge as being about communities and complex interconnected systems, as Haraway (1998) explains, then the imbalance in voices from the field is one that needs to be addressed. Mäkelä and Latva-Somppi (2011) illustrate the richness that can be brought by artist-practitioners and how these new additions to the field have resulted in a move towards explorations of creative processes and away from the traditional examination of artistic practice and artefacts.

This paper uses the creation of the artwork *Things We Can Know* to speak about craft making and the value inherent in the making process. Defining making from within offers critical insights that need to be understood on their own terms as:

> ... to deny the feasibility of something that is alleged to have been done or the possibility of an event that is supposed to have been observed, merely because we cannot understand in terms of our hitherto accepted framework how it could have been done or could have happened, may often result in explaining away quite genuine practices or experiences. (Polanyi, 1962, p. 51)

This paper is concerned with how craft making can shape how we understand the world and argues that because of the embodied and connected way craft teaches us, it can reorientate us towards more ecologically harmonious perspectives.

This is echoed in my practice as an artist, in which I explore the ways we create, store and transmit knowledge through making. In my artworks and experiences, I seek to deepen the relationships between people and materials and create connections to our world that encourage gentler ways of living. Delving into the idea of knowledge as an ecosystem that encompasses human and more-than-human nature, this thinking expands knowledge not just to plants and creatures but also to materials and things. My work encourages relational and empathetic ways of interacting with the world, demonstrated in the *Things We Can Know* project, which sought to make the often unseen aspects of making tangible, moving

consciously through the process, including tool making, community input, skill sharing, creation and presentation.

Figure 1

Left: Collecting materials from the local area to create tools. Image author's own. Right: Tools created in a collaborative workshop, which were used for mark making on paper and clay. Image Seamus Flanagan.



Debates about the definitions of 'craft', 'art' and 'design' have plagued theory and practice for centuries. For many makers, 'craft' covers more than just interactions with materials or the search to 'master' a skill. It is an approach—an ethos—that guides how people create in the world. It is not solely about producing objects; it is, as Aktas (2020) puts it, a 'co-emergence' in which the materials are a 'co-maker' in the process. It is a collaboration or 'correspondence' (Ingold, 2013a). If we think about craft making itself as situated knowledge, then the components that constitute craft are expansive; craft is the craftsperson, materials and tools all situated in an interconnected world. For my practice, the real meaning of craft lies in how, through making, we can become conscious of and grow to better understand these interdependencies. We can learn to 'be with the world, rather than merely being in it' (Aktas, 2020, p. 98).

Within this concept, when I speak about objects, I am talking about those things that come from the interaction between human bodies and the environment through the act of making. Objects can be finished or unfinished; they can blur the line between thing and artefact. The objects that I discuss below try to evade the process of being 'swallowed up in objects made' (Ingold, 2013a). They are objects that incorporate process into their presentation. They sit, as their name *Things We Can Know* suggests, closer to things.

Overview of the process of creating *Things We Can Know*

During my residency in Farnham World Craft Town, England, I had the chance to synthesise some of my thinking around making as embodied, relational knowledge through an active creative project. To start the residency, I facilitated a workshop that formed the basis of the sculptures I made at Farnham. The workshop, a collaboration with a group of local creatives, considered the ecosystem of making and discussed how materials, tools, space and people come together to form collective knowledge. Together, we walked the land, a humble local park, and gathered from this environment. We created tools from materials we had foraged and learned to use these tools for mark making on paper and clay. In each activity, we took turns making a mark on every page and clay slab so that no single person controlled the outcome of a work (Figure 2). We swapped tools and shared knowledge about how to use them, with each person adapting or adding to the vocabulary of the unusual tools. The result was a cooperative series of sketches on clay and paper. The sketches were rooted in the environment and produced together through an exchange of knowledge.

Workshop participants in Farnham World Craft Town using tools they created from found materials to make collaborative drawings. Image Seamus Flanagan.

Figure 2

Workshop participants in Farnham World Craft Town using tools they created from found materials to make collaborative drawings. Image Seamus Flanagan.



These sketches were the foundational material for a series of experiments in the glass studio. In the studio, I created moulds and forms based on the sketches. I cast and blew glass into these various mould forms to create component parts that could be assembled into final works. Translating the marks made on paper and clay into glass, I explored the visual language we had created in the workshop while adding my own artistic research from the residency. In this way, the forms also reference Farnham's cultural heritage, drawing inspiration from vernacular architecture, museum artefacts and the area's industrial history of ceramics. In this process, I knew how I wanted to create: by breaking down the making process and making each step explicit. Focusing on the how, I sacrificed the what; with no set outcome, I did not know what the end result would be.

Figure 3

Images from left to right show the process involving mark making on clay slabs, creating plaster moulds from these marks and black glass cast from the plaster moulds. Image author's own.



For me, the joy was creating something completely new that I would never have made if I had not been in this place with the people I had encountered. The work is a tangible representation of our collective knowledge and experience, in a particular environment, at a particular time. The final sculptures incorporate the tools from their making into the composition; half-formed mistakes sit alongside 'successes'. The compositions were not designed via the intention of the maker but through a series of processes and collaboration involving materials, environment and people. The structure of *Things We Can Know* is flexible. Being made up of assembled components, it is able to adapt and respond to its environment. For example, the height of a piece could be easily reduced for the restrictions

of a display cabinet. Conversely, forms could be spread out to occupy more space in a larger exhibition. This configuration allows room for future curatorial choice, enabling the works to absorb more collective knowledge as they continue to interact with the world.

Figure 4

Images showing the process from 3-D plaster moulds to blown-glass form. The moulds were cast from the clay slabs created in the collaborative workshop. Images author's own.



Polanyi (1967), in his seminal text *The Tacit Dimension*, stated that 'I shall reconsider human knowledge by starting from the fact that we can know more than we can tell' (p. 4). For anyone who has sought to explain a making process, this statement rings true. There is so much that goes into using your body to create that cannot be expressed through words. To understand human knowledge, we must recognise its sensuous, sensual and emotional contexts, as these shape 'what we know, what we can know, and what we want to know' (Dormer, 1994, p. 99). It is this sentiment that led me to title the works made in Farnham *Things We Can Know*. Making teaches us not only how to create objects but also the essence of what is required for the act of creation.

The making of *Things We Can Know* serves as a study for the topics discussed in this paper. It illustrates the unique position that craft holds in a spectrum of different forms of knowledge while not advocating for it over any other forms of knowing and instead highlighting the value of craft to our human experience and understanding of our place within the world.

Opposing dualism in knowledge creation

How we value different ways of knowing is deeply ingrained in our culture and psyche, although this view is slowly shifting. Mind–body dualism, where the body is an unthinking entity, is deeply rooted in Western thought. In *The Thinking Hand*, Pallassmaa (2009) explains how the modern 'cult of the body' in Western philosophy has located the site of rational thought in the mind and left a cleft between bodily experience and thought. It is not just that these elements have been fractured or separated—the mind is placed above the body in terms of the hierarchy of knowledge. The search for disembodied objectivity has pervaded 'rational' thought in the West for centuries. This disembodiment of knowledge feels jarringly at odds with craft making and is one of the main drivers behind the creation of *Things We Can Know.*

It could be argued that the placing of human over nature and the disembodied, unfeeling, unemotional approach to shaping our current societal frameworks has enabled the growth of the prevailing capitalist ideology. As Hill (2006) puts it in a chapter entitled *Perversion and Global Neoliberalism*, 'capitalism is not kind' (p.109). It prioritises efficiency and quick returns. From a capitalist viewpoint, craft making falls under the label of 'inefficient'. Dormer (1994) illustrates this in his discussions about how the slowness of craft puts it at odds with the way we live and educate today. However, it is exactly craft's oppositional qualities that serve as an important antidote to dominant ideologies, particularly those that separate us from the effort of extraction and production, leaving us as undereducated consumers of 'stuff' (Miller, 2010).

Although the mind–body dualism is the dominant model, there are also thinkers who have brought the body back into the conversation through the exploration of embodied knowledge, tactic knowledge and intangible knowledge. Kant (1781/1998) expressed the idea of the hand as a window to the mind, and Ponty's (2012) phenomenological approach centred on 'lived experience'. These reinforce the idea that our physical interactions with the world are fundamental to our understanding of it. The idea of interconnected knowledge feeds into the design of the creation process of *Things We Can Know*, centring interactions between people, materials, place and objects and emphasising connection rather than separation.

Baard (2007) explores this wider, connected conception of knowledge. Although she perceived this through the lens of quantum physics, her conception resonates strongly with my own thinking on making as knowledge creation:

> Knowledge making is not a mediated activity, despite the common refrain to the contrary. Knowing is a direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting with the

> world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation. The entangled practices of knowing and being are material practices. (p. 379)

In the series *Things We Can Know*, I sought to make these 'entangled practices of knowing' explicit by structuring the process of creation, taking the starting point as the environment. It then moved to the collaborative workshop, where the tools were created and a visual language was developed. This language was then filtered through myself as the artist/maker, incorporating my experiences of place into the work. The sculptures were produced with a team in the glass studio and presented back to the world through exhibitions. This process is reflected in the final artworks in several ways but most obviously by using handmade tools as central elements in the work's composition. In Figures 5 and 6, stick-like tools stained with ink sit alongside the blown-glass elements. These inclusions pay homage to the process. It is easy to imagine the sticks being picked up again and used; these are not dead materials.

In *Things We Can Know*, the cleanness of a finished, intentionally designed piece of craft work is abandoned, and the slow, iterative and inefficient process is celebrated. This is not to dismiss the search for perfection that drives some makers but rather to provoke a discussion on the value of making from an insider perceptive. In this discussion, questions are raised about who sets the criteria on which we judge worth and worthiness. In *Ways of Being*, Bridle (2022) explains the idea of 'umwelt' (species specific perspective of the world) in relation to intelligence. Using the example of judging the intelligence of gibbons based on human experience, he demonstrates how setting criteria from a particular worldview to judge something that falls outside of this view will inevitably fall short of assessing the intended subject. More than simply challenging conclusions being made about value, we must examine the criteria against which these judgements have been weighed, asking whose criteria were used and for whom they were used.

Figure 5

Things We Can Know I*, 2024. Materials: blown-glass forms, unglazed ceramic tiles, handmade tools, 24ct gold leaf, handmade tools. Dimensions: 30 cm (L), 24 cm (D), 20 cm (H). Image Lorenzo Tonti.*



Figure 6

Things We Can Know III*, 2024. Materials: blown-glass form, unglazed ceramic tile, handmade tools, 16ct lemon gold leaf. Dimensions: 30 cm (L), 24 cm (D), 20 cm (H). Image Lorenzo Tonti.*



Knowledge and the Body

Craft is a 'physical process involving the physical handling of the medium' (Dormer, 1997, p. 25). In *The Invention of Craft*, Adamson (2019) points to the limitations of verbal or written knowledge in the communication of the totality of the making process, seeing the manual skills of making as deeply intertwined with cognitive processes in a way that resists separation. We must feel and experience this form of knowledge in our bodies and hold that information there, passing it from body to body. Other forms of transmission will not and cannot contain the same level of information. In this concept of craft knowledge, mind and body are not separated into thinking and doing; rather, cognition is embodied.

In the workshop for *Things We Can Know*, the process of transmission was intentional, with each person being asked to pass their handmade tool to the next person to use. The tools were unusual, meaning that they were unfamiliar, and an exchange about how to use them was required. However, to truly understand how much you could press down on a point or

how softly a tool would run across a surface, the person had to experience these sensations firsthand. The encouragement from an 'experienced' maker to try again but with a lighter touch or a demonstration of how to hold a tool in use are part of the learning experience, but the real learning is felt when the body understands a movement feels right.

In making, there is an internal experience that is difficult to capture. The flow state or feeling when you understand the process is not easy to describe to someone who has not experienced it. You must experience the state of flow to really understand what the movement or action requires. It is what Brinck (2025) calls 'non-verbal craft thinking' (p. 31). The inability to translate essence into words speaks to the complexity of the knowledge generated through making (Groth & Nithikul, 2025; Ingold, 2013a; Dormer, 1997).

This ambiguity often leads to misunderstanding of the value of craft making or reduces it to outputs, in that 'many existing historical and theoretical contributions favour interpretation of craft practice as a finished object(s) disassociated from the deep personal tendencies and individual values of the maker' (Valentine, 2011). For example, in glass making, we can judge a person's skill based on their ability to complete a number of basic forms in the workshop: a paper weight, a drinking glass or a plate. However, the way the person moves, the feel of the material, the tools they use, how they direct others—all of these are not captured in criteria that are based solely on disembodied artefacts. Perspective based solely on the object misses learning beyond technique such as a greater understanding of our own bodies, of materials and of how we relate to the environment.

In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) tell us that reason is shaped by 'the peculiarities of our human body'. This thinking grounds knowledge in our bodily experiences; in doing so, it brings emotional intelligence back into 'reason'. By expanding our focus corporally, the transmission of traditional craft skills is a prime example of knowledge that reside not solely in the brain but also in the body. As discussed above, the difficulty is that people cannot comprehend practical knowledge intellectually until they have experienced it. Making is a process that provides living examples of embodied knowledge that cannot be dissected and compartmentalised into simple dualism or easily explained in words—it resists. Craft is an act of resistance.

For example, as shown in Figure 7, the making of *Things We Can Know* depended not only on my own actions in the workshop but on those of the people assisting in the production. Our default of separating outcome from human in this instance misses much of what is needed to understand the making process, that is, 'to eliminate our human perceptive from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity' (Polanyi, 1962, p. 3). Objects are a critical part of

the ecosystem, but to take them as isolated things overlooks much of the valuable lessons making can offer. It is to mistake ‘information’ for ‘knowledge’ (Ingold, 2013a).

Figure 7

Working as a team in the glassblowing workshop to make elements for Things We Can Know*. Author working with technical tutor Laura Quinn and UCA Artist in residence Aria Kiani. Image Seamus Flanagan.*



Making as Thinking

As discussed above, looking outside of craft for an explanation of its contribution may ‘miss the integrity of a whole other world of knowledge—that of the craftsperson’ (Dormer, 1997, p. 229). A reframing of how we conceive of knowledge is required. O’Connor (2005), an ethnographer who researched the learning process in glassmaking, advocates a shift from cognitive readings to ‘corporeal readings’ (p. 183).

Figure 8

Shaping molten glass by hand using wet newspaper as a barrier. Image Seamus Flanagan.



Once immersed in the process (and when it is going well), there is a 'losing of oneself' that gives the impression that you are working in harmony with the material, moving with it and making joint decisions. Sennet (2008) refers to this connection with the material that is yet to become an object as having 'become the thing on which we are working' (p. 174). Richard Malone, in an interview with Hand (2025), described this process in his own work: 'I don't design things, the thing is made. I don't know how but it just comes together in the studio and that's how it happens'. It is precisely this disappearing into and emerging out of the material that is interesting in studying knowledge creation and transmission. We lose sight of where the material or maker ends and of the point at which the material has become an object. As O'Connor (2005) describes it, 'the particulars of technique recede and become, as objects of subsidiary awareness, servants of the whole' (p. 190). Making contains a feeling of intuitiveness that is hyper-focused on the task at hand while simultaneously bracketing conscious thought.

This idea of superseded consciousness does not denote some sort of magical process wherein manifestation alone conjures the object. A frequent frustration for novice glass blowers is opening the annealer (the kiln where the glass cools overnight) and seeing that

the piece has shrunk or is not the masterpiece they put in there the day before (O'Connor, 2005). This experience illustrates how intention alone is not enough. The relationship between maker and material needs to be developed over time to achieve the intended outcomes. Failure is a large part of the journey. This 'demoralising' feeling is familiar to all who have set out to learn a craft (see Dormer, 1994; O'Connor, 2017). That taste of 'flow' or oneness with the material—the sense that you are 'getting it'—is cruelly juxtaposed with the reality of your skills when you step back to admire your work. Despite the learning curve, the awakening of bodily intelligence through contact with a material is an often-quoted shared experience by makers when they explain how they picked their particular material. This is a phenomenon I have experienced firsthand and have been told about again and again in my role interviewing craftspeople for the Homo Faber Guide. Since 2020, I have interviewed more than one hundred makers, many of whom have recounted this sense of uncovering an undefinable, felt connection to a particular material.

In this way, we see that we do not think in order to make; rather, making is thinking in and of itself and is done in partnership with the environment, other bodies and material. A reimagining of knowledge put forward by Noë (2009) frames knowledge as an exchange between body, brain and environment. It is relational: the body, but the body in the world. This not only expands making as an interaction between body and material but also contextualises both within their worlds. This coming together is more than one shaping the other; it is an exchange of experience. Similarly, Bridle (2022) takes this idea of relationships and expands it to an ecology of intelligence, further seeing intelligence as a multiple and extending it not just to beings but also to things (2022). Within glass making, an ecosystem might encompass, among other things, the studio environment, people, materials, tools and the objects made. Everything must come together and work simultaneously towards a shared goal for the making process to be successful. This is one of the key lessons of craft knowledge: connection.

Objects as Living Archives

If we consider objects as part of an ecosystem of knowledge, then through conscious making, craft objects can be conceived as sites of knowledge, that is, a place where information is stored and can be accessed or, as Whitehead ((1978) puts it, 'how an entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is' (p. 23). For me, this is how I think about my practice: The process of learning, the transfer of skills, embodying knowledge and creating work are all part of the subject matter. The final works are not 'complete'; they are put out in the world, begin a process of becoming that is dependent on how they are received, and finally interact with the world once they are part of it. As Ingold (2013b) puts it, 'nothing is ever finished, every artefact is a way station on its way to something else'.

Figure 9

Component parts for Things We Can Know *in the cutting workshop. Image author's own.*



In *Things We Can Know*, each individual part is stacked and arranged in the final works. None has been glued or secured to fix the form, and my first composition is only a starting point. The sculptures can be shown in part or whole or with an entirely different composition to be decided by the exhibiting venue, curator or eventual owner of the works. In this way, they remain unfinished, offering further interaction that continues the making process after the work has left the studio. This process of becoming illustrates that objects are not static artefacts; rather, they are part of our living ecosystem and, as such, are active contributors. The object is never separate from the maker or the making process.

Rosler et al. (2013) call us to allow the object to 'act' for itself rather than imposing meaning, highlighting 'its wooden insistence on being there in front of you, with you. Looking for meaning, you are forced to look through it. Change the conversation!' (p. 11). Here, the

realness or tangible nature of the object refuses to be reduced to a mere idea or symbol; instead, the object is copresent with you in space. We are asked to question the process of searching for meaning beyond the object and to shift in a radical way towards sitting with our coexistence and respecting the object's autonomy in that space. This locates knowledge inside the object itself.

Figure 10

Things We Can Know II*, 2024. Materials: blown-glass forms, glazed ceramic tile, handmade tools, 22ct moon gold leaf. Dimensions 28 cm (L), 18 cm (D), 27 cm (H). Image Lorenzo Tonti.*



In *Things We Can Know*, I explored the idea of constructed knowledge combined with my personal embodied skills. My work offers viewers an opportunity to access an experience in which they are invited to rethink knowledge in a broader context, question their place within the ecosystem or, as Oliver (1986) put it, to find 'your place in the family of things' (pp. 14–15), rearranging themselves in relation to the object presented rather than forcing a meaning onto that object. Interaction with these objects offers a trigger to connect us back to the context of the object itself, decentre our existence and give up 'our imaginary position as the centre' (Cuno et al., 2004, p. 50). The object acts as a portal to another location or position, allowing the observer to see the world differently. The potential of objects to challenge our thinking allows them to feed back into the ecosystem of knowledge. The object is the connector between the embodied knowledge of the maker and the embodied

experience of interaction with the object. Again, it is this power to connect that gives objects the potential to shift our thinking radically.

Knowledge, Empathy and Ecological Connection

As illustrated throughout this paper, relationship, connection and interaction constitute a significant portion of the value of the making process. Craft knowledge can play a crucial role in our understanding of the interconnectedness of our world. Creating forms from raw materials ties us to how our human world is formed. Through making we can glimpse the energy, resources and impact of our built environment. Glass blowing, the central method of production for *Things We Can Know*, is done in intensive heat and is physically demanding (Figures 7 and 8). This can bring forth an understanding that is felt through the depletion of personal energy in tandem with the depletion of heat energy and of materials (the emptying of the pot of glass). These are all very tangible ways to understand how creation is linked to destruction—an important environmental lesson in our consumerist world.

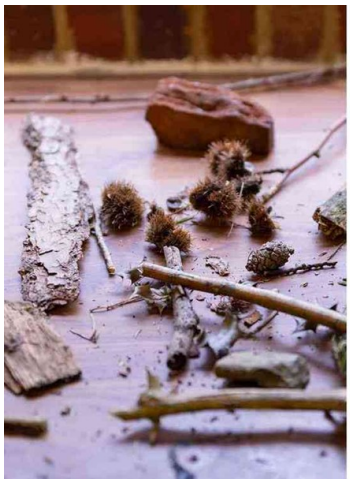
In high-income countries, the exponentially increasing consumption of objects has become problematic. We buy new, cheap, disposable things that hold little value and can be replaced with ease. Rapidly changing trends, powerful marketing and built-in obsolescence have changed our relationship with things. In *Emotionally Durable Design*, Chapman (2015) explains how simple population rise is not the cause of our dramatically increased consumption habits: With a population increase of 50%, there was a 1000% increase in resource consumption in the same time frame. Behavioural and value-based attitudes are clearly at play. Challenging these attitudes, Chapman (2015) puts forward a different and more holistic model than the outdated economic value system we currently operate under: 'In the "natural capital" model, the world's economy is located within the larger economy of natural resources and ecosystem services that sustain all life, including us' (p. 4). Here, value is not monetary but linked to the interconnectedness of life and based on relationships and balance.

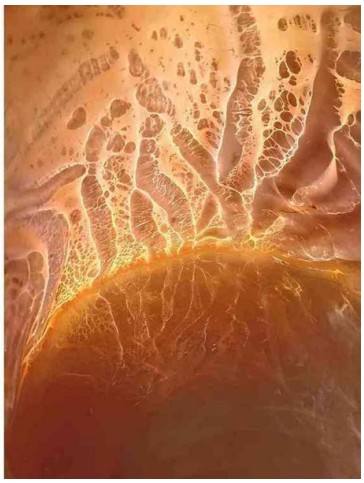
Craft making is about the relationships formed through interaction with materials, and it generates knowledge from the inside through practical experience (Ingold, 2013b). This relational approach encourages much-needed empathy, as the disassociation between climate science and our direct interactions with the world around us continues to grow (Ingold, 2013b). Our alienation from making and from an understanding of the resources involved in the transformation of materials into things has created a disconnect between human bodies and objects. Making can reestablish 'a relationship between us and the world that is co-responsive', emphasising all the interdependencies on which we depend to thrive (Ingold, 2013b). Mäkelä (2022), a ceramic artist, refers to making as an 'entangled process',

rooted in landscapes and people (pp. 28–29). Thinking of things in the wholeness of their context can open up new routes to build an empathetic understanding of our impacts on the environment. This thought process provides not just information in the form of facts and figures but also whole-body sensory experiences that can lead us to a deeper connection to the material world (Adamson, 2019).

Figure 11

Images from left to right: the gathered materials that were used to make tools to mark clay slabs, the burnt clay mould in the glass studio, and light refracting through the surface texture of the mould on the glass form. Images author's own.





The role of the body, particularly how it interacts with space and objects, can be made visible in craft techniques that emphasise tactile, slow making processes. In *Things We Can Know*, as our starting point, we used natural materials to create tools from our environment. The objective was to consider how we utilise more-than-human nature and how we can do this in reverent, respectful ways. The memory of the origin of the artefact is consciously inserted into its creation (Figure 11). This type of interconnected knowledge is what Lakoff and Johnston (1999, p.4) describe when they state that reason is not an 'essence that separates us from other animals; rather it places us on a continuum with them'.

This paper has discussed how the slowness of craft is at odds with our current fast-paced, disposable society, in which we are constantly striving towards progress in an imagined linear trajectory. The slowness of craft objects offers an alternative reimagining of our understanding of the world. The materials and skills used often have long histories, and they exist and are steeped in what Haraway (2003) refers to as 'storied deep time' (p. 8). Material surfaces carry meaning and speak to us in different ways:

> Materials and surfaces have languages of their own. Stone speaks of its distant geological origins, its durability and inherent permanence. Brick makes one think of earth and fire, gravity, and the ageless traditional of construction. Bronze evokes the extreme heat of its manufacture, the ancient processes of casting, and the passage of time as measured by its patina. Wood speaks of its two existences and time scales; its first life as a growing tree and the second as a human artefact made by the caring hand of the carpenter or cabinetmaker. There are all materials and surfaces that speak pleasurably of layered time as opposed to the industrially made materials of today that are usually flat, ageless and voiceless. (Pallassmaa, 2017, p. 178)

Similarly, Ingold (2013b) talks about surfaces as places of exchange where the object interacts with its environment. In *Things We Can Know*, I considered these material languages and their histories in relation to place (see Farnham World Craft Town, 2024). Farnham has a rich history of ceramic making, which is tied to the geological formation of the area on which the town sits. I visited the old pottery to learn about the production that had occurred there and spent time at the University of the Creative Arts working with the technical staff and students to see how they used the material. I explored how I would use this in combination with my current glass-making skills. The use of clay in the workshop to capture the visual language created by the workshop participants with their handmade tools was a conscious one informed by the rich history of the material in this place.

The preciousness, deep-rooted sense of time and transformation of materials in craft objects give them cultural weight. They act as touchpoints for understanding and appreciating the value of making. Treating objects as important actors in our lived experience can change ‘how we touch our world in our attempt to turn it into our home’ (Pallasmaa, 2016, p. 185). In this way, craft objects actively contribute to building knowledge that can change our relationship with our environment for the better.

Conclusions

I believe that we have to rebuild the foundations of how we conceptualise and assign value to knowledge. Unless we begin to genuinely recognise the significance of embodied experience and its contribution to knowledge, we will continue to lose tacit skills that fall outside of the current prevailing ideological frameworks. In the realm of craft making, practitioners themselves must assert the importance of their methods and perspectives; otherwise, the discipline risks continued marginalisation—dismissed as either antiquated or incompatible with contemporary life. We need to form criteria of worth from within, grounded in craft’s own perspective—its ‘umwelt’ or ‘raison d'être’—and crucially how it

feeds into—and out of—other ways of understanding the world. This highlights the critical role of making in an ecosystem of knowledge.

Figure 12

Things We Can Know V*, 2024. Materials: blown-glass forms, cast glass tile, handmade tools, 24ct gold leaf. Dimensions: 38 cm (L), 23 cm (W), 50 cm (H). Image Lorenzo Tonti.*



Projects such as *Things We Can Know* can provide insights into practice from the perspective of the craftsperson. A structured exploration of process through the dissection of key stages of making allows for a reflective process by which a greater understanding of the value of craft making can be expressed through the process, materials and objects created. This project can be repeated in numerous contexts with different places, people, artists, workshops and materials involved but using the same format. This would be an interesting development and could produce comparative situated knowledge, which would add much-needed voices from the field to the discussion on embodied knowledge in craft making.

This paper has argued the need to expand definitions of what constitutes research, who gets to do it and how knowledge might be formed and shared. We must not only challenge conclusions being made about value but also examine the criteria against which these judgements have been weighed. An alternative to conventional research outputs that is situated in context and lived experience could embrace objects, movements and shared processes as legitimate effective forms of inquiry. This holistic approach echoes a core value in craft making: interconnection.

In this framework, the craft object becomes the bridge between the embodied knowledge of the maker and the embodied experience of the viewer or user. It forms an essential part of our understanding of craft making, but we must be cautious not to take objects in isolation and impose meaning on them, allowing for the sensual, emotional and bodily experience of being present with the object to inform our understanding of it. We must attend to the felt experience of encountering the object, valuing this form of knowledge alongside more formal measures, such as technical skill, design logic and visual impact. It is this power to deeply connect us with an internal, grounded sense of place in the world that gives objects the potential to shift our thinking radically. Recognising objects as active participants in our lived experience can alter how we move through the world.

In light of this, making becomes a path towards knowledge that reorients our relationship with our surroundings—reclaiming embodied ways of knowing in a time of ecological urgency. Faced with environmental breakdown, craft making is not only a critical form of knowledge—it is also a persistent act of resistance.

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