

### Localism and Provenance

Craft focuses on the locally attuned, rather than global ubiquity. It recognises the value of knowing where things come from, who made them and that a groundedness can be found in terms of culture, nature and resources that are significant to place.

### Embodiment

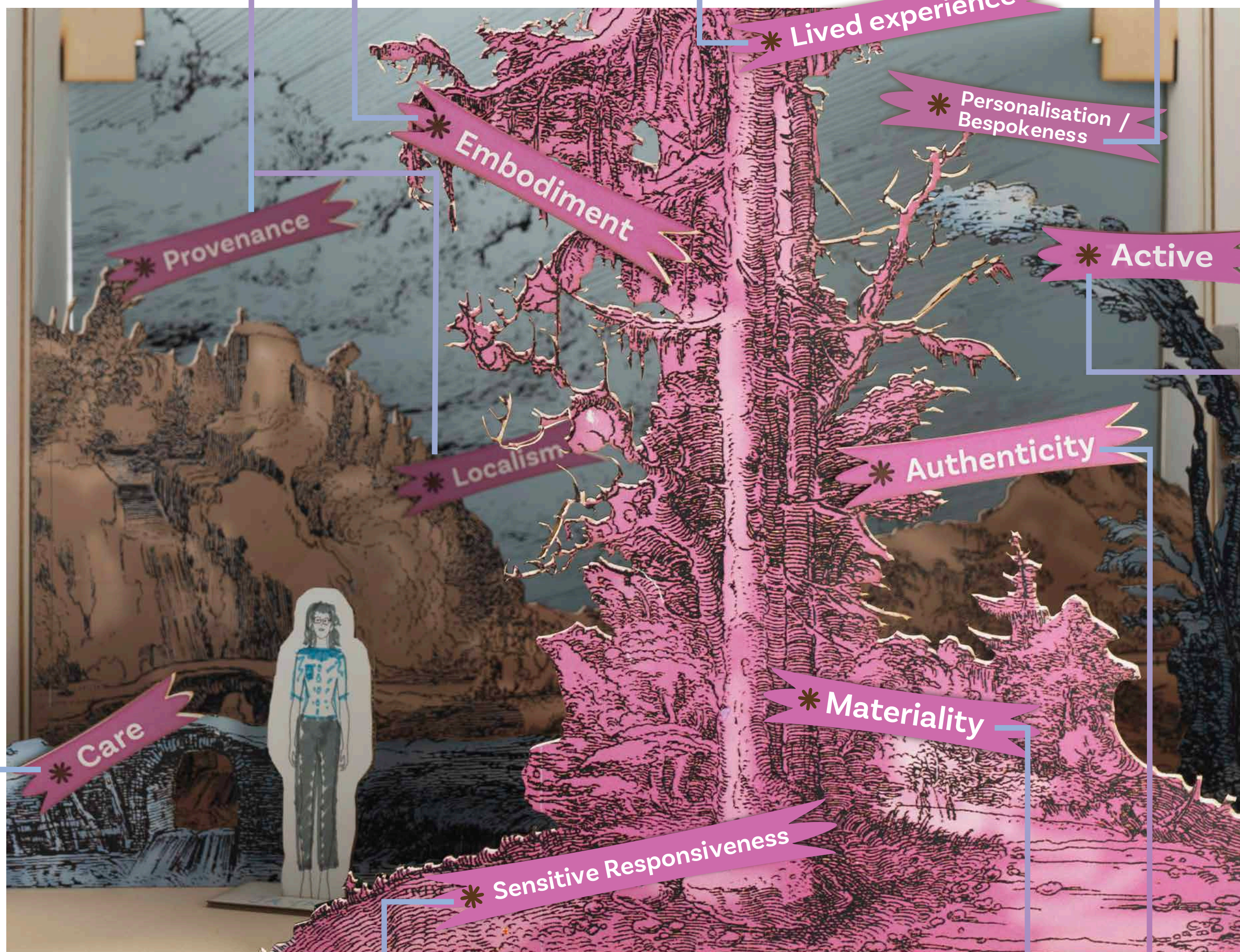
Craft appreciates the significance of our somatic/physical/bodily experiences within both modes of production and processes of meaning making.

### Lived experience

Craft thinking and doing is always tethered to lived experience and the insights gained through the physical engagement with something. It is an ethos of living with and through things and an acknowledgement that in doing so we adjust and mould them around ourselves – in turn, we understand ourselves through doing this.

### Personalisation / Bespokeness

Our Craft Ethos aims at the particular rather than the general. It values the voice of the individual, champions subjectivity and favours qualitative experience over quantitative functionality. Outcomes are not reliant on large-scale industrial resources – think crafting masses of batches, not designing for mass production.



### Care

Care is expressed as both careful skilled making and a broader careful approach. Examples include: doing things well for their own sake; recognising value in the whole process of production as well resulting outcome; and taking care of how materials, environments and people are treated. Craft champions care as a political act or position which relates to alternative modes of production and consumption that can be set against global consumerism, labour relations in mass production, the relationship with the planet and how resources are used.

### Sensitive Responsiveness

Our Craft Ethos appreciates that all things can be altered to better fit the purpose for which they are used. This is the antithesis of an ascribed perfection and also counter to the notion of something being 'finished'. More broadly, craft acknowledges that objects and humans are in a constant state of 'becoming', and open to change and adaptation. Craft brings a recognition of the unpredictability, complexity or messiness of a situation and the potential to improvise. As such, a craft approach is responsive rather than interventionist.

### Materiality

The importance of material engagement as a way of thinking is core to our Craft Ethos. Recognising that materials are more than matter and have a social/cultural/technical component is key. This is present in a sensitive and attuned engagement and dialogue with the materials of a situation (including people, data, physical and non-physical things).

### Authenticity

Authenticity can manifest in the materiality of individually-crafted artefacts, but also in social/community contexts. Authenticity can emerge through meaningful collaborations, and at an ecological level through a recognition of and sensitivity to, the environmental context in which practices occur.



The landscape of craft

The creation of comprehensive (and useful) craft definitions has a long standing reputation as a thorny challenge. It can be fraught with the risks of either being overly simplistic and reductive, or so overreaching that it takes ownership of concepts and practices that could equally be claimed by other fields and professions.

We therefore are not going down the path of presenting a list of rigidly defining attributes. We instead propose a **landscape of craft**, in which a range of characteristics feature that have connections to, and affinity with, craft practices and thinking. In this way specific characteristics can live within the landscape, finding differing positions of significance and value for particular people and/or contexts. (E.g. for some people materiality is foregrounded and adherence to localism may only reach middle ground, while for others embodiment plays centre stage with abstract notions of authenticity sitting somewhere in the misty and less-travelled background.)

It is in the relative importance of these characteristics, and the ways they are actioned, that we identify distinctions between craft and other forms of practice, rather than a dogmatic assertion of what can and cannot be considered craft or crafting.

**Craft draws particular ways of knowing and acting together and holds them dear.**


We propose that this flexible way of thinking allows for a more inclusive and useful approach to recognising and applying craft characteristics beyond the restrictive bounds of a defined set of material practices, an economic sector, or an academic field.

The characteristics we describe in this poster make up our **Craft Ethos** which we feel broadly encompasses the human-centred (humane), and often idiosyncratic ways in which craft approaches and engages with the world. We believe that this ethos provides a challenging and interesting way to think and act, and could be applied to a range of contexts and challenges.

We have put our ethos to work in the hiCraft project to provide a distinct lens on issues and debates concerning the internet, IoT and digital connectedness more broadly. Aspects of this work can be found in the other posters in this pack.

The Characteristics of our Craft Ethos


The craft characteristics that make up our ethos are all, in some way, interconnected and can, to some degree, blur into one another – we’ve chosen to describe them separately here to help articulate our ideas, but as you will read, there are overlaps between them.



**Active** — Craft champions people being active creators (not passive consumers).

At its core, craft is a way of being, doing and thinking that is concretised through the making of things. Lehmann (2012) claims that “There is a distinct ontological dimension to making, as it implies the emergence of the new” (p.155).

Through bringing new things into being we assert some sense of control on our world, how we understand it and how we can support those living within it. For craft, this culminates in strong acts of ‘knowing’ and transformation in relation to materiality, makerly techniques and nature (including people). Craft has always been tethered to lived experience and to being human and the sense of control that can be felt through acts of making. Sennett (2009) describes this as a “sharp social edge” (p.44). Craft has been used not only to make new, improve or repair objects but also to impact social situations. Creative engagement through craft realises the agency of the individual to leverage craft to improve society. Craft has often been a political act – just as the Suffragettes defaced pennies to stamp ‘Votes for Women’ into them and send them back into circulation, the history of craft is replete with examples of the creative act as a political message.



**Personalisation / Bespokeness** — Our Craft Ethos aims at the particular, rather than the general. It values the voice of the individual, champions subjectivity and favours qualitative experience over quantitative functionality.

The notion of ‘bespoke’ is commonly deployed (often rather cynically) as a cypher for quality and ‘craftsmanship’ by commercial manufacturers (e.g. bespoke kitchens), and in service industries to promote personalised offers (e.g. bespoke experiences). In addition, it embodies notions of costly exclusivity and so, by implication, higher economic value and social status (e.g. bespoke tailoring). There is also an aspect of historicity to the bespoke, as Glenn Adamson notes: “Up until the late eighteenth century, virtually everything was made to order. The whole world was bespoke” (2018, p.65). Bespokeness is associated with simplistic and unrealistic visions of a utopian pre-industrial hand-made rural society, with the Arts and Crafts movement being (unfairly) held up as one of the major culprits.

It is all too easy to consign bespoke to either a commercial lever put to work (erroneously or not) to secure market advantage, or to denote things that are beyond the reach (and appreciation?) of the masses. But we argue that bespokeness, as a more grounded and democratic concept, has a significant role to play within craft practices. Practices that incline towards the creation of one-offs and/or works that are ‘tailored’ to particular people, communities, places, or unique applications/needs, stand in opposition to the standardisation and infinite replicability of mass production processes. This is relevant not in terms of exclusivity, but in the human dignity that it embodies for both makers and users. As such bespokeing can be considered as much an ethical mindset as an activity.



**Localism & Provenance** — Craft focuses on the locally attuned. It recognises the value of knowing where things come from and who made them. A groundedness can be found in terms of culture, nature and resources that is significant to place.

There is a strong tradition within the Arts and Crafts movement and beyond, of recognising the value of the local – both in terms of material resources and just as significantly in the visual language of works. Work that is inspired by, and reflects, the geographic, environmental, and/or social specificity of a place is seen to embody a form of authenticity that makes it distinct from products that may have been manufactured in multiple (and unknown) global locations. Increasing concerns about the environment adds power to the concept of localism, as both a practical approach, and an ethical stance that embodies sustainable values (even if oversimplified and erroneous at times!).

On a wider sociological level, Glenn Adamson argues;

“...when we ignore our material environment, we are essentially forgetting who we are and where we came from. If we divorce ourselves from the collective memory of place, we alienate ourselves from our surroundings and from people alike, choosing isolation over group identity.” (2018, p.88)

His plea for a wider recognition of place, and the material environment that helps define it, effectively moves the concepts of localism and provenance beyond limited geographic and individual definitions (i.e. where something was made and by whom) to include more ecological and community/social-oriented thinking that links to our craft characteristic of care.

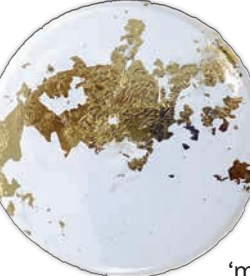
Our Craft Ethos – How we got here

As academics for whom craft thinking and making has played a significant part in our research practices over a (worrying!) number of years, reflecting on the significance of craft practice has been a continuing, if sometimes implicit, activity. What has brought this into particular focus in the last ten years has been working in the context of HCI (Human Computer Interaction) and collaborating with researchers outside the field of craft. The polite (but persistent!) request to ‘tell us what you mean by a craft approach’ has challenged us to be more explicit, and articulate craft in a way that has meaning and utility for others.

Collaborating on projects that have an IoT (internet of things) focus in recent years, culminating in hiCraft, has provided the opportunity to think about the relationship between our Craft Ethos and themes relevant to debates within, but more importantly, beyond the sector.

Previous research that informed our thinking about craft in relation to digital interaction includes the *Crafting our Digital Future* publication. Co-authored for the 2015 Digital Design Weekend at the V&A ([https://digitransglasgow.github.io/crafting\\_our\\_digital\\_futures/contributions/27.html](https://digitransglasgow.github.io/crafting_our_digital_futures/contributions/27.html)), this publication reflected on our visits to Mexico and India. Craft related notions of localism, bespokeness and nuanced specialisation, iterative development, and the blurring of the lines between consumption and production, were all raised when discussing the lively and messy digital markets of Mexico and India. Through these explorations we came to draw distinctions between the monoculture of the global digital offering and the distinctive local character of Mexico City and Delhi’s digital cultures.

Working with the Mozilla Foundation, (a not-for-profit arm of the company that owns the Firefox web browser that campaigns for a



**Materiality** — The importance of material engagement as way of thinking is core to our Craft Ethos. We recognise that materials are more than matter and have a social/cultural/technical component.

Rather than the more extractive nature of industrial mass-manufacturing that uses ‘materials as resources’, we argue that craft is more collaborative – makers ‘work within materials’ in order to negotiate, rather than impose, an outcome. So in craft, physical materials can be recognised as ‘alive’, in a making process, and have agency. This view draws on Ingold’s work (2013) where he argues for making to be considered a morphogenic process, more akin to growth than manufacture. For him, making is a process in which materials are active rather than passive and the maker “joins forces with them” (p.21) rather than seeking ultimate control and dominance. He recognises the intimate and reflexive relationship that craft practitioners have with materials they use, and the active, evolutionary, and situated nature of the way they work within (rather than with) the world.

To extend this view, Adamson argues that materiality is a “purpose-oriented phenomenon” (2018 p.155). Matter becomes material at the point of change where an intention is enacted on it, so it is inseparable from human agency. A tree becomes material when it is processed towards an end... making a table or a chopstick. In the same way organic matter only becomes an ingredient when it is caught up in the purpose-oriented act of making a meal. He argues: “... materiality is perhaps better viewed as a meeting point, where raw materials and human purpose align” (2018 p.155).

This active phenomenological view of materiality, in which people and the world are intimately intertwined, further emphasises the human-oriented and ecologically attuned nature of the other characteristics that we are proposing within our Craft Ethos.



**Sensitive Responsiveness / Becoming** — Our Craft Ethos appreciates that all things can be altered to better fit the purpose in which they are used. Craft brings a recognition of the unpredictability, complexity or messiness of a situation and the potential to improvise.

Craft is comfortable with repair, with adhocism and incremental adjustment. As such it is comfortable with there always being the possibility for something to be changed. This is a subtle, but powerful characteristic and is at the heart of our Craft Ethos. There is an inherent acceptance in a craft approach that nothing is ever really ‘done’. Every thing: object, person, situation can always adapt and be adapted. This acceptance is fundamental – it means that there is no point focusing on absolute perfection and no sense in seeing things as finite. Instead we can see possibility for newness and growth in all things. It keeps us on our toes and allows us to develop a sensitivity to ways that things need or want to change (or be changed) and how we might respond to those changes in the making process. Thinking about the act of making in a craft approach, Brinck (2024) highlights Philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s notion of intelligent skill and thinking-in-acting “Coping with such situational uncertainty requires flexibility and thoughtful improvisation – produced on the spur-of-the-moment by applying lessons already learnt to unfamiliar conditions” (Ryle, 1976, p. 77). Extending this more widely, craft as an ethos in life uses our attunement to the people, things and situations we relate to in order to act with care, compassion and sensitivity and to use our skills and experiences to be flexible to each new situation.



**Authenticity** — Authenticity can manifest in the materiality of individually-crafted artefacts, but also in social/community contexts and at an ecological level.

Authenticity in the arts and crafts is often associated with provenance, authorship and the originality of a piece of work, aspects that are linked to an object’s economic value.

However, an authentic ‘experience’ can be much richer and more meaningful. Reflecting on the nature and status of relics (as an authentic ‘trace’), Adamson (2018) discusses the significance of material presence and physical touch to engender a spiritual experience and sense of connectedness in which belief (trust) in a relic’s provenance is key. We argue that this embodied experience of connectedness can be found widely in the crafts. The material qualities of a craftwork create a link between maker and ‘user’, representing an authenticity and intangible value that is distinct from the functional/instrumental interaction people have with industrially produced products.

However, it is important not to suggest that authenticity is reliant only on the making practices of a specific maker. Kettley (2016) proposes three ways in which craft functions in terms of authenticity: Individually, Socially and Ecologically.


“These three modes are not mutually exclusive; rather, they describe between them related scales of action. They might be seen to provide a schema for thinking: individual mindfulness with (and as) tools and materials; socially engaged, ethical and ‘virtuous’; and in dynamic relation to other practical and epistemological practices.” (p.178)

This expanded definition of authenticity within craft sits well within our broader ethos. Moving beyond the individual (while still recognising the significance of embodied practice and experiences) provides a wider set of socially-engaged and politically-attuned understandings that have value when applied to the digital debates which are the focus of this project.

healthier internet), we contributed to the first of their *Ding* publications, which focused on IoT and decentralisation using craft as a lens (<https://www.mozillapulse.org/entry/438>).

Inspired by a short exploratory trip to rural India, hosted by Quicksand design agency (<http://quicksand.co.in/>), Jayne developed a piece that reflected on the creation of the Lota (a generic water carrying vessel) and the myriad bespoke designs that have evolved to fit the requirements and desires of individual users and communities, who have, through generations, helped shape Lota pots. She highlights the differences between this ‘organic’, democratic and craft-oriented approach and that of the large global internet companies and the political and financial dominance they hold, that allows them to limit the flourishing of differing visions and experiences of the internet. “If we subscribe this craft lens to the Internet, we see that there is no perfect ‘thing’, since all things can change, and nothing is ever really ‘finished”” (p.47).

Justin took a more UK-centric example of the ‘bill hook’ (though these are ubiquitous worldwide) as an example of a tool that has evolved over time. These utilitarian tools were crafted locally in pre-industrial blacksmith workshops to respond to the environmental conditions and personal proclivities of their users. This practice resulted in different designs being associated with different counties, or even villages across the UK; bill hooks were truly bespoke to both place and people. Similar to Jayne’s argument, Justin used this example to promote a vision of a more vernacular and decentralised internet with increased opportunity to shape the digital tools we use.



**Embodiment** — Craft appreciates the significance of our somatic/physical/ bodily experiences within both modes of production and processes of meaning making.


“Recent advances in cognitive sciences support the idea that cognition is not just happening in the head, but it is an embodied activity facilitated by a person’s active engagement with their material and social environment” (Groth & Nimkulrat 2024, p.1). Makers have instinctively always known this! Craft is a practice founded in engagement with and manipulation of materials (physical or otherwise, see Materiality section) – a way of thinking through doing – it is embodied. Therefore, physical touch, as a means of engaging ‘directly’ with materials in the making process, and as a means of experiencing completed artefacts, is often a significant aspect of appreciating, understanding and valuing craftworks. The tactile and sensual experience that is touch is therefore an active way of knowing for both maker and consumer.

However, the sensual nature of touch has resulted in it being considered within the history of European thought as the lowest of the senses, and less amenable to rational articulation than the visual and the aural (Adamson, 2018). As McCullough argues, “Hands are underrated. Eyes are in charge, mind gets all the study, and heads do all the talking” (1998, p.1).

Complex tactility, which often characterises natural and non-uniform materials, can have an appeal and interest that is lacking in mass-manufactured products made with standardised surfaces and textures. One of the ways that human-to-human and human-to-world connectedness can be made manifest in crafted objects is through the tactile experience of natural materials. There is also a palpable sense that the artefact you are touching has been touched by the maker – this is an asynchronous connection, but a connection all the same, and embodies an act of care.

Hands are not the only part of our bodies that build up and experience this kind of personal knowledge. As ‘em-bodied’ beings our entire bodies can ‘know’, and as Pragmatist John Dewey argued “Making as an embodied practice fulfils something basic to being human.” (Jacob, 2018, p.19).

Emphasising the significance and value of the full breadth of human experience aligns with many of the other craft characteristics proposed in this poster.




**Lived experience** — Craft thinking and doing is always tethered to lived experience and the insights gained through the physical engagement with something.

Even when craft objects are heralded as esoteric artefacts they always retain facets of their functionality – the domestic and the bodily.

As Kettley (2010) states, craft objects are “available for the aesthetic experience, yet part of the ongoing flow of pragmatic action” (p.14). Further, as Adamson states; “every object represents a potential social connection” and “the real test of an object’s worth lies not in its efficiency, novelty or even beauty (...) but whether it gives us a sense of our shared humanity” (Adamson, 2018, p.9). The contention here is that if we can understand tangible things in our lives then we can better understand fellow humans.

Something we have long valued about craft is that it acknowledges the messy reality of being human, rather than trying to smooth out what being human is in order to design a simplified solution for a specific context. Craft acknowledges that life and the nature of being human is complex, entangled and far from smooth – and that this is okay. Craft objects as things that are open to adaptation and always becoming (see the Sensitive Responsiveness / Becoming section) reside within lived experience, the humanness and messiness of all that this means.



**Care** — is expressed as both careful skilled making and a broader careful approach. Examples include: doing things well for their own sake; recognising value in the whole process of production as well as the resulting outcome; and taking care of how materials, environments and people are treated.

Care taking in a making process – often expressed through commitment, skill and expertise – is a recognised part of the appreciation and value proposition for craft works within a market economy. As significant as this is for establishing a viable commercial practice for makers, it risks care being commodified and measured only in economic terms. But we would argue there can be unspoken ‘contract’ between maker and consumer in which the care imbued in the making is mirrored and reciprocated in the way in which well-crafted things are cared for and treasured. This ‘contract’ is not just based on the financial investment made, but reflects a person-to-person connection, made manifest and lasting, through a physical ‘care-full’ form (i.e. a form full of care), whether or not it costs thousands of pounds or was gifted.

In his seminal book *The Craftsmen* (2009), Richard Sennett takes a broad sociological perspective on craft as a mode of practice that can be applied across all sectors, not just within an economic or materially specific sector. He argues that craft embodies a basic human instinct and desire “to do a job well for its own sake” (p.9). This simple statement elegantly encompasses notions of care at the level of personal ethics, socio-economic arrangements and political inclinations. At a personal level, pride in one’s work is an expression of the care and skill that is needed to achieve a high quality outcome. At a social level, recognition is required for the value of a job and the care taken to achieve it; these aspects cannot be fully quantified within a simple economic model. In addition, Sennett challenges political philosophies that are based on privileging the consumer over the producer because these do not fully recognise, care for, and value makers beyond their ability to efficiently produce goods.

We would align all these understandings of care with our broadly humane Craft Ethos, and like William Morris in the 19th century and Pragmatic philosopher John Dewey in the 20th, agree with Sennett’s claim that “Good craftsmanship implies socialism” (2009, p.288).



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Investigating how we can define and foster a healthy relationship between people, the internet and things through the ethos of craft

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hiCraft is a research project, based at Northumbria and Newcastle Universities in the North East of the England, exploring healthier ways to live with IoT using craft as a methodological and practical lens. hiCraft speaks to concerns about trust, bias and the lack of transparency around the way we currently digitally connect. Our investigation seeks to define and foster a healthy relationship between people, the internet and things using craft-oriented thinking and making.

The hiCraft team are Prof Justin Marshall, Prof Jayne Wallace, Prof Jon Rogers, Dr Nick Taylor, Dr Philip Heslop, Dr Jayn Verkerk and Esther Kisby.

For more visit [www.hicraftnorthumbria.org](http://www.hicraftnorthumbria.org)

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