

A Shared Human Currency: Craft and Conviviality

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Abstract

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This thesis explores how we can more meaningfully engage with the world by making useful things with our hands out of natural materials. As we do this more and more, it makes plain the adjacency of our abuse of the natural world and our volunteered dissociation from it in consumer culture. In this thesis, a case will be made for the ritualization of the mundane, finding that the remedies to many of our inherited cultural ills are hidden in the every day stuff that already lives in front of us.

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P R E F A C E

The scope of this thesis at times feels broad and big, but only because it has everything to do with what is small and dear and *here*. It has proven difficult to talk about what is *here* in any more specific terms than broad and big, because what is right in front of any of us is an increasingly complex subject—getting exponentially more complex as we begin to project what’s right in front of us into the future to plan for health and sustainability.

The effort of working for the future revolves largely around an issue of faith as it deals with the unknown and the unformed—what does not yet exist and the assumption that it will. In a culture with a millennia's worth of inherited biases regarding the validity, or lack thereof, of issues of faith, I understand this language is risky business. But I find it nonetheless necessary as, at least in my own life, I’ve found that the things we believe in are yet some of the the most practical matters we can busy ourselves with. The everyday domain of such subjects are to deal with simple but consequent questions of *How do we want to live?* *What are we doing here?* and *Why would we want to change?*

There exists a popular answer to these questions that has been tacitly implied by our contagious and globalizing American culture. Historically, America's answer to such questions has been some variation of *more*. More profit, more innovation, more things, more discovery, more control, more growth—American culture often being as bold as to say that this pursuit of *more* is fundamentally human. The pursuit of more may, in part, be a biologically primary trait, but if it is, it is also shared by and subject to the same fundamentality of our human desire for peace, affection, and work well done for its own sake—these qualities often relating to and reinforcing one another. The danger of equating having *more* with having *meaning* seems to be the same whether it be personal or societal. This perspective seduces us into understanding that we always begin at a deficit, that what we have is not enough, and therefore we are not capable—without corporate sponsorship or considerable financial influence—to incite meaningful social change. Further, it also aims to convince us that an answer is always around the bend—often translating to being only a purchase a way—postponing our agency to begin living in healthier ways as individuals *now*. And so, when talking about health in the future, it's clear that there needs to be at least as much work in undoing as there is work to do.

A liberated spiritual imagination is not limited by these same ambitions towards *more*. The spacious territory discovered in a mature spirituality, I have found in my research, almost always begins by recognizing the plain and simple goodness of the world as we have found it in front of us—and of our circumstances of being in it together. It understands that a *pleasant* place can be much more powerful than a *magnificent* place—dignifying the ordinary people, places, and things that appear every day in our lives. From this starting point, the imagination is emancipated to move forward, seeing clearly the complexities and challenges that emerge in nature and in each other to engage them with sensitivity, care, and hope.

So, in our current cultural rush to innovate, how can we remind ourselves of the goodness of basic things? The trick seems to be the cultivation of an ability to hold the future, the present, and the past in similar esteem. To hope for the evolution of production and economic processes towards greater equity, comfort, and beauty; while simultaneously participating in those processes from the foundation of an acute awareness of the beauty of things already around us.

In this thesis, I hope not to argue for a newer or more refined set of ideals—we have seen the distortions that lofty ideals breed through the hegemony of religion, the hubris of capitalist economics, and the immobility of political games. My primary argument, instead, is that any

path forward into healthier circumstances begins with recognizing that the basic circumstances of existence are good. To help us understand this, we might engage the world by making useful things with our hands out of natural materials. As we do this, it will make plain the adjacency of our abuse of the natural world and our volunteered dissociation from it in consumer culture. Drawing this line, we'll be able to address one by engaging with the other—by re-associating ourselves with the world of made things, we might participate in alleviating the exploitation of the environment and even begin to cherish it.

This argument rests on recognizing the truth of three things: *the joy of work*, *the goodness of the world*, and *the particularity of beauty*. Of course, these are all three ways of saying the same thing, but my hope is that by refracting light through the same prism at different angles, something new might be revealed about the qualities inherent in both the light and the prism. I'll do my best to show how these “truths” interact and remain relevant at intersecting scales of our participation in the built environment, from bowls to buildings.

In the first section, *The Joy of Work*, a case will be made for the wellspring of pleasure that is hidden in our labor. Its aim is to help illustrate that we are not only making the world in our work, but we are also making ourselves, who then comprise the world.

The second section, *The Goodness of the World*, will deal largely with naming the layers of illusion that have colored our perception of the world and advocate for their removal. It will explore the ways we have become alienated from reality in our economic practices and why the physicality that we share in common is so important.

The third section deals with *The Particularity of Beauty*. This section will try to further pull things out of the abstract and into the particular—referring both to the things that we make, as well as to one another. It will discuss the importance of how we see each other in community, and, in turn, the ever-present value of participation in life together.

After exploring these ideas, we will examine where and how they have converged in the past through a surveyed look at The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, also known as the Shakers.

The study will then conclude in the construction of a small project in Kingston, NY, where a small team and myself used solely hand tools and found materials to assemble a space for eating, thinking, and being with one another.

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Any hope that drives meaningful change is a conversation between three voices: faith, doubt, and patience. Faith, because trust in the fundamental goodness of one another and of the earth must be resonant and true. Doubt, because it is only through the critical desperation for what's real that our faith is legitimate. And patience, because any hope, formed in faith and tempered by doubt, is never fully articulate in that it is not yet fully ripened—and even as it ripens so it will rot, consumed by time and dedicated to the harvest of another season. Meaningful hope requires time to mature and must be fed, cycling back, by faith in goodness. If hope is to be resilient, it should not be threatened but enjoyed by time spent with it, ultimately ceding to time in its own death as new hopes are born.

So, this document is written with as much doubt as it is with faith in what could be true for the future. Throughout my study, I have struggled time and again to remain convinced of my own convictions, ultimately ceding to let them dissolve into ever-widening circles of what proves itself to be real in the midst of my earnest, but often immature, ideological wandering. By writing, however, I am denying that third and essential member in the formation of healthy hope: patience. I am not able to wait to see how these hopes will mature and necessarily prove themselves not fully formed. At best, this case I make for what is true—or what could be true—is a seed, not the fruit itself. A seed that I trust will grow through increased exposure to time, people, and places, but who's fruit does not exist here as a collection of static ideas.

The body of literature and ideas incorporated into the following pages encompass a diversity of disciplines and occupations mostly peculiar to architectural research. I feel the broadening of participating voices in the architectural conversation is necessary as the current system of architectural practice, as well as pedagogy, is failing the world in a time of great need. The discipline has largely become yet another industrialized producer through which to manufacture commodities for sale, often reinforcing already present economic disparities and dividing the shared environment into segregated eddies of race, gender, and income.

This thesis is for my school, the University of Washington, and is written under a half-hope and half-insistence that education remain an adaptive and thoughtful practice engaged and grounded in the student experience, reluctant to participate in the fads of popular society. As this has not been my experience in university, the time afforded to me to indulge in writing a thesis

has also invited the responsibility to communicate the very extent to which it has not. Despite my effort at every turn to blunt language of criticism in hopes of favoring language of invitation, I realize that the beginning of this inquiry in guarding what seemed to me in danger is inherently and unavoidably present throughout.

From the outset, I have to acknowledge the deep influence of many thinkers and the consequent unoriginality of my own convictions. There is nothing truly new to be found here. This thesis is a confluence and a derivation of existing thought. I am thankful for the pioneering and prophetic work of Wendell Berry, Abraham Joshua Heschel in his beautiful book *The Sabbath*, the depth of inquiry in Richard Sennet's *The Craftsman*, pastors Barbara Brown Taylor and Eugene Petersen, poet David Whyte, artist Makoto Fujimura, woodworkers Joshua Vogel and Peter Korn, and many others.

Part I |

The Joy of Work

A House in Time

Work, among all its abstracts, is actually intimacy, the place where the self meets the world.

David Whyte

In 17th century France there lived a Carmelite monk to whom people flocked from far and wide to watch do his chores. His given name was Nicolas Herman, but he was known to his monastic brothers as Frère Laurent de la Résurrection (or Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection). He served as a lay brother in his Parisian monastery washing dishes, chopping vegetables, and repairing sandals with such radiant joy that his daily tasks attracted people poor and rich alike to seek spiritual guidance through conversation and observation. Brother Lawrence credited the joy he found in his drudgery to his deep affection for God in a journal he kept that was never meant to be published. After his passing, a fellow Carmelite brother, Abbé Joseph de Beaufort, found this journal and thought it too wonderful not to share with others. In it, Brother Lawrence writes,

I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.¹

¹ Lawrence and John J. Delaney. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 1977. p. 98.

The sincere gentleness that radiated from this allegedly clumsy and awkward monk is evidence of the gratitude he experienced to simply be alive. As a young person, he had been conscripted to fight in the Thirty-Years War where he was unfortunately intimate with the violent brutalities of war and was released following a serious injury. From his writings, however, it's clear that he understood the synonymy of life, time, and God—either because of, or inspiring, his wholehearted devotion to his daily chores.

Brother Lawrence understood that time is, at its root, a gift. It is a gift because we did not, as far as we can know, garner it through any sort of exchange. It was—and continues to be—free, despite the economizing forces of our current industrial culture. Within the generosity of time we are permitted to find ourselves in whatever ways we do. It only requires of us that we understand that time is not a currency to be spent, but a gift to be received.

In *The Eyes of the Skin*, architectural critic and professor Juhani Pallasmaa writes,

We have a mental need to grasp that we are rooted in the continuity of time, and in the man-made world it is the task of architecture to facilitate this experience. Architecture domesticates limitless space and enables us to inhabit it, but it should likewise domesticate endless time and enable us to inhabit the continuum of time.²

Domesticating time is wonderful language to communicate the ambition of work in our lives. If we add to Pallasmaa's claim of domesticating time through architecture with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's understanding of the Sabbath, however, we find that we don't solely domesticate time through structures of architecture, but also through structures of practice. *Rhythms*—whether in our daily processes themselves or in how we are present to them. Heschel writes,

There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share...life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern... The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time.³

² Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Wiley, 2014. p. 32.

³ Heschel, Abraham J. *The Sabbath*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. p. 3.

We all share a desire to find a context, or home, in time. Heschel offers that we can meaningfully inhabit time through practice. The practice, in Heschel's case, is the observation of a Sabbath day: one day a week when we might observe abstention and rest to give context to the other days we spend laboring. It is a sacred reminder of the Hebrew creation story, when after spending six days making the world, God rests for a day to observe the goodness and beauty of what God made. Heschel invites us into this seventh day of rest to experience and feel the space found in time, a discovery that gives purpose and context to the other six days of labor.

This has become a chiefly difficult task in an economy that incessantly assigns time with an equivalent dollar amount. The reality of time as a gift can no longer be felt when it has immediate monetary opportunity or cost. We talk of "time wasted" and "time spent," always assigning economic terms to one of the few phenomena in our lives that we cannot truly buy more of. This is made clearer when Heschel explains,

Technical civilization is man's conquest of space...in technical civilization, we expend time to gain space. Yet to have more does not mean to be more. The power we attain in the world of space terminates abruptly at the borderline of time.⁴

"Technical civilization" as Heschel described it in 1951, might be more accurately termed in today's lexicon as "absolute capitalism." In our current economy, the dichotomy drawn between the realm of space and the realm of time is extremely important. Space, as we often understand it, is something we can own, claim, or trade. Time, however, is a gift freely given—there is no expectation of an exchange or transaction for the circumstances of being here. We cannot buy more time as much as we did not buy our lives when we were born—but space can always be negotiated.

However, as Heschel notes, "to overlook either of them is to be partially blind. What we plead against is man's unconditional surrender to space, his enslavement to things."⁵ We cannot ignore one in favor of the other, but must distribute equally the attention we give to our possessions with the hours that we spend making or using them. The corporate dependence that has been fostered over the last century by industrialized production of the objects we employ in

⁴ Heschel, Abraham J. *The Sabbath*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. p. 3.

⁵ *The Sabbath*. p. 6.

our daily lives—either voluntarily or involuntarily—has surrendered us to them. We have little opportunity to explore what it means to live outside of our purchases. This phenomena has cultivated what philosopher and mechanic Matthew B. Crawford defines as “passivity” in our cultural character.⁶ In the consumer economy of today, we no longer belong to ourselves, our freedom can only be addressed abstractly through creeds, pledges, or slogans. The products we buy, by buying them in such volume as we have over the last half-century, have clandestinely come to own us. Our dependance on corporate distribution chains places us directly under their authority, giving us little other choice than to trust their ability to provide to us what we understand we need.

When we buy, we buy the easiest thing to sell, but the hardest thing to own: *answers*. Quick, cheap, and disposable answers to our hunger, our boredom, our creativity, and our relationships to one another. Products, here widely understood, are a deception in attaining what we want. In a world where everything can be purchased, we consequently also qualify one another as products and restrict the forgiveness and exploration of each other as beings *in process*. To understand this problem more accurately, let’s first establish a vocabulary around the role of products in our lives and the ways in which we produce them.

Homo Faber

Considered by Hannah Arendt to be humanity’s defining quality, our capacity to make and use tools to create sets us apart from the rest of the natural world. She modernized the Latin phrase *Homo faber*, translating to “man as maker,” to inform a philosophy around political action, common life, and art:

The world, the man-made home erected on earth and made of the material which earthly nature delivers into human hands, consists not of things that are consumed but of things that are used. If nature and the earth generally constitute the condition of human life, then the world and the things of the world constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can be at home on earth.⁷

⁶ Crawford, Matthew B. *Shop Class As Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into The Value Of Work*. New York : Penguin Books, 2010. Print.

⁷ Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. Print. p. 134.

“The world,” as Arendt uses it, contextualizes the made-things of humans as separate from nature; Arendt defines humanity’s identity as characteristically both creative and separate.

Arendt juxtaposed her definition of *homo faber* with a lower, more basic archetypal human she called *animal laborans*. *Animal laborans* produced made-things, but only to those made-thing’s own end. Bakers, farmers, framers, blacksmiths, and other occupations produced artifacts of “labor” which Arendt defined by their consumption, impermanence, and perpetual need. “Labor” was the lowest form of human participation in the world for Arendt as there was little freedom associated with it. Biological need for food and shelter bound those who made those things to produce them in perpetuity and the work was itself its own justification.

Homo faber, however, was esteemed by the capacity to make artifacts of “work,” which are characterized by their permanence. Art, policy, and other “higher” creations fall into this category as they allude to meanings greater than their individual maker as well as physically out live the lifespan of their creators.

Richard Sennet, a student of Arendt, expanded on Arendt’s philosophy in his book *The Craftsman*. He admired his teacher and her philosophy, but noted that *homo faber* was an incomplete idea, as it imposed a false binary between the making of a thing and the value of the thing that is made.

Sennet accurately felt that this understanding was not telling the whole story. Implicit in Arendt’s designations of work and labor was the assumption of a division between intellect and labor. Sennet writes, “For Arendt, the mind engages once labor is done. Another, more balanced view is that thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making.”⁸ He argued that craftsmanship, or “the desire to do a job well done for its own sake,” is present in the character of both *homo faber* as well as *animal laborans*. Craftsmanship is a quality that dignifies any participating party and more holistically paints the picture of what it means to be human. He writes, “History has drawn fault lines dividing practice and theory, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance.”⁹

⁸ Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Print. p. 7.

⁹ *The Craftsman*. p. 11.

Sennet’s amendment importantly incorporates an understanding of felt time into Hannah Arendt’s too narrow definition of humanity. Relating with humanity’s fundamental creative impulse as craftsmanship—instead of solely producing instances of Arendt’s “work”—begins to relate more holistically and empathetically with the experience of being human. The human life is lived day by day, hour by hour, and as such requires the formation of quotidian meaning to be discussed. Craftsmanship provides insight and direction for these issues of time and compassionately addresses human life as an experience beyond its artifacts.

Alienation and You

Karl Marx also had an understanding of humanity that was inherently tied to our patterns of labor and material culture. Despite Marx’s divisiveness as a thinker, psychoanalyst and philosopher Eric Fromm argued in his book, *Marx’s Concept of Man*, that the ideas of Marx were often exaggerated and misused towards destructive ends. Primarily, Fromm notes, Marx was advocating for the “development of the individual personality,”¹⁰ which Marx aptly assessed was under threat as industrialized production and wealth concentration increased in mid-19th Century Europe. Although historically used to justify oppressive regimes and legitimize revolutions, Marx’s ideas are firmly rooted in the inherent dignity and capacity of individual people to produce their own means of life. In that practice of production, every person might experience what he defined as true freedom. Fromm summarizes:

Labor is the self-expression of humanity, an expression of their individual physical and mental powers. In this process of genuine activity humanity develops itself, becomes itself; work is not only a means to an end—the product—but an end in itself, the meaningful expression of human energy; hence work is enjoyable.¹¹

“Genuine activity,” for Marx, translated to those activities in which any given person expressed and participated in the formation of their material environment. Notably, what they made was less important than them having an active role in making at all. Marx writes, “As individuals

¹⁰ Marx, Karl, and Erich Fromm. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co, 1961. Print. p. 38

¹¹ *Marx's Concept of Man*. p. 42

express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.”¹²

The industrialized pattern of mass production posed a great shift to how individuals, at large, were able to express their lives. Marx saw that expressions would become limited, not liberated, by the abundance of commercially available, mass produced things. In becoming inevitably subjected to a consumer economy, this material homogeneity ultimately would breed passivity in not only the impoverished of a nation, but the wealthy alike. Prioritizing material comforts over participating in their manufacture would demean those across the economic spectrum by estranging them from the realities of communal dependency and mutual necessity. People, like the things they now bought in volume, would be reduced to component parts, fulfilling a limited and specialized role in a societal machine—condemned and alienated from the essence of their humanity.

The essence of humanity, Marx argued, is rather relationship—or in his own words, he wrote that a person is comprised of “an ensemble of social relations.”¹³ Fromm notes that Marx “is concerned with the liberation of man from a kind of work which destroys his individuality, which transforms him into a thing, and which makes him into the slave of things.”¹⁴ As autonomous individuals, one is able to have sincere and constructive relations to other autonomous individuals; but if one is made a slave to things, they are no longer able to participate in any genuine or generative form of relationship, instead bound by their deconstructed labor.

Not much that inspired Marx’s social critique has changed in the last century and half since his writings—in many cases, the systems he was challenging have taken greater control. Absolute capitalism has now spread through most of the world, where few are able to indulge in the genuine activity as Marx understood it.

Regarding the things we make, Marx wrote, “They are man’s creations; they are valuable aids for life, yet each one of them is also a trap, a temptation to confuse life with things,

¹² Marx, Karl, and Erich Fromm. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co, 1961. Print.

¹³ Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *Theses on Feuerbach*. German Ideology. 1845.

¹⁴ *Marx's Concept of Man*. p. 49.

experience with artifacts.”¹⁵ Many of the authors we’ve cited so far would agree with Marx’s assessment. They might also suggest that we have indulged this temptation to the point of it becoming the status quo, an unquestioned and implicit standard. Gone may be the opportunity to steer the ship along a different course, but we must take care to understand that our ship is, in fact, on a course. Our circumstances are not novel, nor are they incidental. We can locate ourselves, currently, along a lineage of indulgence and waste. Ultimately, the attitude that confuses life with things, also confuses things with life. With the advent of digital technology and the internet, this conflation has compounded. Designed digital realms have amalgamated with, if not fully colonized, the shared physical world we hold less and less in common.

In Process

In the technologized culture of today, a curated obsession with identity, vocation, and individuality positions us in relationship with one another as commodities; a determined good that has an equivalent value. Compounded by social media’s influence, we have consented to understanding ourselves as certain kinds of things, or products. Just as there is no monetary value to be assigned to any hour of the day, there is no equivalent value for any human identity, and equally no moment in which we are a truly definite entity regardless. Instead, we are a conversation held with time and with each other—through which we have the freedom to participate *in situ* to the complexity of our circumstances. Desiring exclusively a product-like version of one another is like being satisfied with reading the sheet music for a song, without actually ever hearing the music it describes. In the experience of a song, music is being destroyed the same moment it is being created, each note beginning to end as soon as the musician breathes the sound into being. In the coming and going of each note is the joy of a song, not in its static existence as a collection of notes on a page.

The rhythm of our work, and our rest, is where we find home in the “endless continuity of time” that Pallasmaa talks about. Our presence to our work informs our reciprocal presence to each other, as we either understand work as a means to an end or engage in our work as a practice we carry out worth doing for its own sake. This is a key difference. If we aim only to

¹⁵ *Marx's Concept of Man*. p. 46.

produce a product, and we bypass the process as secondary, the process inevitably costs whatever it costs, as long as we get to where we're going. This attitude begets abuse in both social and environmental relationships, as the relationship of the process to the product itself is not honored. The costs of production can grow enormous, as we are witnessing in the massive environmental degradation occurring today, but are still justified if the end-product is the penultimate pursuit of the company. Myopically understanding products as solely what we put into our carts at the grocery store pushes quickly past the people that grow, harvest, and process our food—pushing them lower and lower until they are virtually nonexistent and inhuman components of an economic machine that can get tomatoes on the shelf for a few cents cheaper. The wisdom of the Bṛagavad Gita offers, “Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive in working.”¹⁶ It knows that the field laborer is submitted to abuse when we only value the food as a product that shows up in our grocery stores.

The economics that industrialized society has developed is an economy of abstraction. The complex ecology of people, materials, and processes inherent in making and distributing things has become lumped into simplified categories of consumer and producer that have no broader vocabulary for engaging with the ecological dimensions of what is a true ecology. The developed and developing web of relationships (person-to-person relationships as well as person-to-product and product-to-nature relationships), all happening and changing within time, are inherently set aside when the product is the only sum that we are equating for in our work and labor.

Makoto Fujimora, a visual artist and writer, coined the term “slow art” as derived from the growing “slow food” movement. “Slow food,” the rebellious inverse of “fast food,” advocates for the return of process in its most fundamental form to food service. Essentially, where fast food says that *making* something doesn't matter as much as *having* something, “slow food” balances the scale. Fast food workers have been subjected to a diminishing participation in their respective drive-through windows where their roles as cooks have been reframed as simple assembly. Slow food invites delight into both the *before* and the *after* of cooking. Simply put, the joy of food isn't only in getting to eat something delicious, but also in making something that's delicious to eat.

¹⁶ Eknath, Easwaran. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Petaluma, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1985. Print.

Fujimora uses “Slow Art” to talk about this idea as it pertains to making art. Fujimora lives this way of thinking as he practices his own form of *Nihonga*—a Japanese technique of painting in which the painter first creates the paints by grinding precious natural materials like shells, stones, and minerals and then builds them up on the work surface in layers over many days. He says of his art, “In the frantic pace of life, we need to slow down and simply observe natural forces around us and create out of that experience. What makes us truly human may not be how fast we are able to accomplish a task but what we experience fully, carefully and quietly in the process.”¹⁷

The quick sprint for profit of absolute capitalism is antithetical to the careful and self-critical approach of the craftsperson. When a woodworker sharpens their chisels and planes before presenting them to a board, or a ceramicist makes one-thousand bowls of the same shape, or a bread baker insists on grinding their own wheat into flour, they are all drawing a holistic connection between their processes and their products. Craft, as a verb, denotes a process; craft, as an adjective, illustrates the quality of the product as emergent from the intentionality of the process. If we can allow ourselves to acknowledge equally the process and product we might discover that the value of any made thing is at least as present before it is made as after.

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So, the joy of work is really two joys; it is the joy of domesticating time (through rhythm and process), but it is also the joy of using our bodies when we labor. Wendell Berry writes in his 1988 essay, *Economy and Pleasure*, “If I could pick any rule of industrial economics to receive a thorough re-examination by our people, it would be the one that says that all hard physical work is ‘drudgery’ and not worth doing.”¹⁸

Working with our bodies invites us into contact with the world. Manual labor, if indulged with the humility and sincerity of someone like Brother Lawrence, can be a wellspring of joy and delight in our lives. We too often underestimate the resonant pleasure of being tired enough at the end of the day to sleep well, or the relationally catalyzing power of working hard together.

¹⁷ Fujimura, Makoto. *Refractions*. NavPress, 2009. Print.

¹⁸ Berry, Wendell. *Economy and Pleasure* from *What Are People For?* San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990. Print. p. 141.

Hard labor democratizes, it levels the playing field between workers by inciting empathy and humor through the unavoidable humiliation involved in trying to do something difficult.

There exists a tacit moral education involved in using our bodies in our work. We, if not embittered by too great a toil, grow in compassion for those just starting along. We learn through failures, which help us communicate more accurately the pitfalls and opportunities of a given task. In labor, we discover our own humanity through stumbling upon our own weakness, which helps to discover our neighbors as we require their help and guidance. If we are available to it, hard labor will open up doors of satisfaction in ourselves that insist on no attainment of exterior good—it is found within us. In *Marx's Concept of Man*, Eric Fromm cites Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in writing,

‘Man...knows himself only inasmuch as he knows the world; he knows the world only within himself and he is aware of himself only within the world...Neither possession, nor power, nor sensuous satisfaction...can fulfill a man's desire for meaning in his life; he remains in all this separate from the whole, hence unhappy. Only in being productively active can man make sense of his life, and while he thus enjoys life, he is not greedily holding on to it. He has given up the greed for *having* and is fulfilled by *being*; he is filled because he is empty; he *is* much, because he *has* little.¹⁹

As we make things, they in turn make us. We simultaneously let go of and become ourselves as we coax creations that are outside of ourselves into life. We work hard and forget ourselves remembering the costs of labor for each other. We learn impermanence, conviviality, and tolerance. And, if we are patient, we might then be transformed holistically from consumer to producer—from dependence to participation.

If we resist the urge towards commodifying our time and our talents, in our work and environments, we discover territory in which our selves can expand. Working with our hands finds meaning in today's world not purely as a counter-culture movement, but in a way that argues for a universal rhythm of life that has inherently empathetic, patient, and creative qualities. Craftwork seizes the means of production, enables a democracy populated by empowered and capable agents, and contests an economy that quantifies people as mere consumers. There is hope to be found in the quotidian tasks of our life through which we

¹⁹ Marx, Karl, and Erich Fromm. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co, 1961. Print. p. 28-29.

domesticate time. If we re-engage with the stuff life is made of—days, hours, and minutes—we locate ourselves humbly amongst one another as people in process; not finished, not whole, but *here*. This is an increasingly revolutionary act in the midst of our growing sphere of digital access, always pulling us further from each other and the natural world we hold in common.

The Goodness of the World

It All Rests On Affection

Where is our comfort but in the free, uninvolved, finally mysterious beauty and grace of this world that we did not make, that has no price?... Where is our pleasure but in working and resting kindly in the presence of this world?

Wendell Berry

Now that we have explored the realm of time, it would be beneficial to explore as best we can the world of things as, in our rapidly digitizing world, it too finds itself in jeopardy and in need of rediscovery.

The Amish *Ordnung* is a set of oral guidelines that helps Amish communities to organize around their values in practical, physical ways. Twice a year, community members meet to discuss and amend these rules that include parameters around the use of technology. The Amish have been historically misconstrued as being an anti-technology—and therefore eccentric—separatist sect, but their situation is not quite so two-dimensional. They are, in fact, open to technology that is deemed, during these communal reviews of the *Ordnung*, beneficial to the whole. If a new technology is presented by a community member for potential use, they critically engage with the suggestion to decide whether or not it should be integrated into their lives. Sometimes they opt for a trial period to test out the impact of a new technology on their way of life, and sometimes they don't entertain the possibility. While this approach may seem radical, the core of what the *Ordnung* represents is an explicit expression of the very thing our advertisement culture dreads: it is a community getting together to say, "we have enough right where we are."

Industrialized society has not always critically grappled with what consequences are associated with the advent of any given new technology. We have continued to accept whatever the latest advertised product is without an engaged understanding of what that might do to our lives. Innovation for innovation's sake has been imbued with a self-legitimizing power, so much so that criticizing the advent of new technology is met with heretical accusations of being anti-technology or anti-progress (as the Amish communities have certainly been accused of). But what the Amish do in practice, is present a way to acknowledge complexity and live humbly and fruitfully with limits, always making sure to begin in the goodness they already know to be around them.

Through the eyes of the Amish, we can see the issue is not about technology, however, but about consumption. The conflation of the two is what has traditionally led to material dependence under the guise of material "freedom." It is increasingly important to understand why and how they are not the same. Philosopher Alan Borgmann draws a helpful illustration to delineate between the two worlds of technology and consumption when he defines them as commanding reality separate from disposable reality, manifested in "things" apart from "devices,"

The stereo as a device contrasts with the instrument as a thing. A thing...has an intelligible and accessible character and calls forth siloed and active human engagement. A thing requires practice while a device invites consumption. Things constitute commanding reality; devices procure disposable reality.²⁰

The juxtaposition between things and devices is not as wrote as Borgmann suggests, however. In the given example, it is easy to posit that the stereo can actually inspire as much as it can distract. However, the instrument is an engaged technology that requires, from our bodies, a relationship and participation.

Importantly, between the two, it's the invitation to consumption that must always be considered. The stereo must be purchased, and the music played on it is also subsequently a product that must be purchased. This is a chain that leads towards further consumption and is

²⁰ Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2003. Print.

not as directly generative as the instrument as a thing—although in most cases, the instrument must also be purchased as well.

At the bottom of Borgmann’s distinction is the wholesome potential of technology to actually enhance our engagement with the natural world—the hand plane of a joiner increases their awareness of the wood they’re working with, or eyeglasses that literally bring the world into clearer view. Borgmann goes further to say that things, as he defines them, “gather our world and radiate significance in ways that contrast with the diversion and distraction afforded by commodities.” Although the Amish may not have Borgmann’s philosophical language to employ at the ready, the sentiment remains in common. The Amish’s expressed wariness of new technologies is not wholly a rejection of technology, but a commitment to remain affiliated with the world of things. They know that if they indulged the new devices that come out in ever-diminishing intervals, they could get distracted from the world they cherish and swept up in the illusion of perpetual dependence in an economy of consumption.

The Amish’s skepticism of modern devices is grounded in their Christian understanding of the world as something made by God, and therefore holy. As Wendell Berry, an outspoken Amish-admirer, said in his poem, *How to Be a Poet*, “There are no un-sacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.”²¹ Understanding the world as a sacrament—pure evidence and expression of the love that created it—is a paradigm that does not cohere with our exploitative industrialist zeitgeist. If an understanding of the world as good remains resonant, then humanity’s creative impulse as expressed through technology is not wholly bad, but rather, as Berry communicated, only been co-opted for destructive or disconnecting purposes. Both the desecrated places as well as the disconnecting technology have been made so in the pursuit of capital or status.

The Judeo-Christian story of the creation of the world, if taken allegorically, is a poem rich with insight. This is the story of the “Fall of Man” in Genesis; the tragic expulsion from a perfect state of grace in the Garden of Eden. The story tells us that the first humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God by eating some fruit God had asked them not to and were consequently cast from their harmonious union with God and cursed to toil to grow their food. When Adam and Eve eat from the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,” however, their folly was not in eating from

²¹ Berry, Wendell. *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*. Washington, D.C: Counterpoint, 1998. Print.

an absolutely evil tree that corrupted them absolutely, but in eating from the tree that gave them knowledge to divide one from the other. It is unceasingly profound that the tree is not eternally condemned as “The Evil Tree”—it is much less straightforward—it is the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” And it is the devil, in the form of a snake, that seduces them into thinking it’s what they want.

The ability to separate any thing from good has been the story of humanity’s fall from a proverbial Edenic state, as well as the story of so many illusions that have colored our perception of the world. We separate mind from flesh, blue-collar work from white-collar work, and urban from rural with a sometimes-conscious and sometimes-subconscious value judgement regarding the validity, or lack thereof, of those things. If we could remove these fabricated biases of bad wholly apart from good, and see them instead as the desecration of something that is fundamentally sacred, how would we begin to cull the devices that distract us in our everyday? What the Amish do differently than the world of absolute economics is exhibit a reluctance to fall from the garden every day in their personal lives as well as in their society. A brother of the Shaker order summarizes it thus:

When humans by transgression lost their primitive rectitude, they lost the unity of their true interest, both to God and their fellow creatures. Hence they became selfish and partial in all their views and pursuits. Instead of feeling it their interest and happiness to honor and build up the cause of God, and benefit their fellow creatures, their feelings were turned to exalt and build up themselves at the expense of the peace and happiness of their own species, and the loss of their union to his Creator.²²

²² From the foreword to the First Covenant adopted by the Second family at New Lebanon

Our Forgotten Body

“The craftsman has been able to call to his or her aid a capacity and a dignity engrained in the human body.”

-Richard Sennet
from *The Craftsman*

We find ourselves, perhaps too late and too earnestly, in a cultural moment where everything seems to be separated; our minds from our bodies, our diets from the act of growing food, our vocations from the ways we make money, and our voices from our democracy. These growing disparities in American culture stem from an unquestioned desire to accrue wealth in competition with our neighbor, blind to the more complex and collaborative reality of the natural world.

In *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters*, furniture maker Peter Korn writes about a revelatory moment he had when he rode a mattress down a flight of stairs as a child,

...delight flashed to fear as the mattress rapidly gained momentum and abruptly punched a hole in the wall opposite the bottom landing. Then—amazing!—broken chunks of granular white plaster, jagged splinters of rough wood lath, and, most impressive of all, a dry, empty cavity behind the wall, a secret world. It had never occurred to me that there might be anything behind the surface.²³

It is true that we often engage with the world as a sort of painted surface. Our manufactured world behaves consistently to our expectations given that we don't try and break through it or into it. These expectations we have of the world, however, are a peculiar and circumstantial derivative of the world that exists beyond our screens. We have become alienated from, or perhaps have still yet to fully discover, what is right under our noses.

In the industrial society of today, when we arrive into life we arrive not into the Earth, but into the Economy. Advertising, mass-manufactured objects, regulated building products, and industrially-produced food wholly comprise our environment. We look at trees through windows, or the sky as we drive home from work, as if looking at a framed image on a wall, joining the militia of other images on our screens and billboards that fill our panorama. There is little incentive presented to entice us out of our passive consumption of a commodified reality—the

²³ Korn, Peter. *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters*. Vintage, 2017.

house that's built keeps us warm and if we can paint the walls a color that we like, all the better. But, the very thing which has been denied, and even exploited, by our culture of consumption is the very medium through which we can discover and participate in the world otherwise: our bodies.

Part of what has kept us inside this metaphorical house is a fabricated bias that is not so blatantly against our bodies, but wholeheartedly in favor of our eyes. My body, now, largely exists to serve my eyes. My hand's primary function is bringing things to my face to see—be it a smart phone, book, or something in the distance I travel toward through steering a car, my hands are effectively only as useful as their ability to get things to my eyes.

If the inverse of this modern phenomena could be considered more fundamentally relevant—that my eyes actually exist to navigate for the safety and efficacy of the rest of my body—what consequence would it have on how we inhabit the world? If my body is the actor of my presence in a shared physical realm between mine and other bodies, then it shares in the same joy, suffering, and fate as the bodies of others as well as the body of the earth.

In *The Eyes of the Skin*, Juhani Pallasmaa defines our cultural bias towards the visual sense as “occulcentrism.” Notably, the cover image of *The Eyes of the Skin*, is Caravaggio's 1602 painting, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*—a rendering of one of Jesus's disciples, Thomas, feeling the spear-stabbed holes in the side of Jesus after he had been resurrected. ‘Doubting Thomas,’ as he is often colloquially referred to, is exhibiting a sincere search for what's real in the midst of a sea of rumors. Seeing, ultimately, is not enough for Thomas to believe, he must touch the wounds of Jesus to know their reality, a gesture which Jesus welcomes when he offers, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”²⁴

We rarely share in Thomas's longing to feel the reality of the body of God—in whatever form that may take. Not merely to see it or only to perceive it, but to *know* the body in and through our own bodies—beyond image, beyond description. As Pallasmaa writes, “The eye is the organ of distance and separation, whereas touch is the sense of nearness, intimacy, and affection.”²⁵

²⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 200. John 20:26.

²⁵ Juhani, Pallasmaa. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Wiley, 2014.

Our eyes are notably still part of our body, so to blame too seriously our visual sense would be to reject a part of ourselves just as we have been doing until now. The eye and the hand are each benefited when used in tandem. They inform and reinforce each other. It is evident that the separation of the eye over the hand is what has influenced the disparity we experience in a digitized world.

The separation and emergent hierarchy of a visual world above the somatic has old roots that run deep. In his resonant essay from 1989, *Feminism, The Body, and The Machine*, Wendell Berry writes,

Implicit in the technological revolution from the beginning has been a new version of an old dualism, one always destructive, and now more destructive than ever. For many centuries there have been people who looked upon the body, as upon the natural world, as encumbrance of the soul, and so have longed to be free of it...More recently, since the beginning of the technological revolution, more and more people have looked upon the body, along with the rest of natural creation, as intolerably imperfect by mechanical standards.²⁶

The “old dualism” that Berry speaks of is a binary that has for centuries allowed its devotees to be convinced of their unworthiness, unholiness, and unimportance. If we look upon the body as “intolerably imperfect” from the outset, the only restitution available for our alleged deficit is allying ourselves with those who have asserted dominance over nature through technological invention or social manipulation. The incompleteness insecurity breeds cracks easily and craves quick answers, available to us in the form of material acquisition. As long as we remain convinced that the human intellect trumps the rest of the organism that houses it, we will remain susceptible to the enterprising forces that have been commodifying out the diversity and vibrancy of our world—both socially and ecologically—over the last two centuries.

To subvert the binary between the intellect and the body is to advocate for the dignity inherent in both our natural bodies as well as the natural world. If we can begin to do this, our historical inheritance will not be a condemning burden, but rather a necessary failure that—as all good failures do—can fuel a creative discussion between form and error. It would prove vital to analyze and criticize the narratives that have been handed down to us to by our skewed societal

²⁶ Berry, Wendell. *Feminism, The Body, and The Machine* from *What Are People For?* San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990. Print. p. 191.

attribution of value. As Japanese philosopher Soetsu Yanagi wrote on the hope of healthy cultural evolution,

...it is said that someone living in proximity to a flowering garden grows insensitive to its fragrance. Likewise, when one becomes too familiar with a sight, one loses the ability to truly see it. Habit robs us of the power to perceive anew, much less the power to be moved...conscious appreciation requires a historical hiatus, an interval in time for looking back.²⁷

The Built Environment

To begin to rescue the dignity and meaning of our shared physical world, we might look to the discipline that is primarily concerned with the built human relationship to the world: architecture. Unfortunately, both systematically as well as in its products, the building profession at large has occupied itself with the acquisition of financial wealth and an adherence to technological trends. Many modern architectural firms, now resembling corporate conglomerates, have succumbed to the same commodifying forces that have served to distance humanity from meaningful participation in the world since the industrial revolution.

Ocularcentrism in modern architecture has left the other senses with which we inhabit the world needing to be re-discovered. As Juhani Pallasmaa writes,

Instead of an existentially grounded plastic and spatial experience, architecture has adopted the psychological strategy of advertising and instant persuasion; buildings have turned into image products detached from existential depth and sincerity.²⁸

As an architecture student, I have seen this compounded by the schools I have attended in two primary ways: one, the use and mastery of computer programs as the primary media for building design is congratulated by teachers and reinforced by both the speed and content of the curricula; and two, the omnipresent and addictive character of social media has cultivated an

²⁷ Yanagi, Soetsu. *The Beauty of Everyday Things*. Penguin Classics, 2019. Print. p. 33.

²⁸ Juhani, Pallasmaa. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Wiley, 2014. Print.

image-driven understanding of “good” architecture in students who become exceptionally adept at selling their projects with money-shot renderings often at the expense of substance and spatial experience. This second factor is especially insidious as it plays on the insecurities and sincere desire to be accepted of the young people who attend universities. These factors have together accumulated in the evident shallowness of both the architectural projects as well as the general ambition of the student bodies and faculty I have come in contact with. There exists little desire to confront the trend towards superficiality that Pallasmaa notes in his book, as we increasingly consent to uploading the responsibility of building design into computer programs and online image banks. As architectural companies have been able to grow over the last half-century, in no small part due to the advent of Computer Aided Drafting (CAD) programs, it seems they have required an increasingly standardized architecture-school graduate to run their computers and pump out projects as if part of an assembly line.

Digital literacy, rather than material sensitivity, has become the desired requisite for the architecture-school graduate. The danger of this superficiality, Pallasmaa argues, is that “humans in turn are commodified.”²⁹ People are commodified both by subjecting themselves to the approval economy of social media—where they become the commodity themselves—in addition to their status as a consumer being continually reinforced in the brand-dominated architecture of the modern American city.

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The spatial poverty of the American built environment is investigated and diagnosed by theologian and pastor Eric O. Jacobsen in his book *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*. His unique vantage point on the built environment as a religious person brings an often missing, but equally significant, perspective to the cities we live in. Jacobsen’s frame of reference evaluates our shared physical space through the adherence to, or dissonance with, a Creator’s intended state of goodness for the world They created. Understanding the world as sacred, instead of as dormant economic opportunity, would dramatically change our relationship to the built environment, and simultaneously, Jacobsen argues, to each other. The

²⁹ Juhani, Pallasmaa. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Wiley, 2014. Print p. 34.

metric Jacobsen employs in an effort to holistically understand human dwelling is the Hebrew word *shalom*,

Shalom can be translated as ‘peace,’ but unlike our use of the word *peace*, it means more than just the absence of conflict. *Shalom* involves restored fellowship with our Creator, human flourishing, justice, and relational wholeness for everyone. And *Shalom* is unmistakably beautiful.³⁰

This potential state of *shalom*, as revealed to us in the metaphorical Garden of Eden, dwells within us all as an intuition that wants things to be better—the impulse towards *shalom* is what tells us that the shopping mall might not be the ultimate culminating image of one of the most advanced civilizations in the world. In his book, Jacobsen meticulously culls through elements of the American built environment to understand why and how humanity has alienated itself from God’s intended world of *shalom*. He begins by exploring the historical, social, and urban consequences of the automobile on the American City,

One of the unintended consequences of the automobile-oriented development that we pursued in the second half of the twentieth century is the way that it has increased the distances at which we encounter one another. It has pushed our homes farther from the places that we work and shop. And because of the large parking lots and wider streets that are needed to accommodate all of these cars even when we are engaged in the same activity in the same places, the distance between us has increased significantly. And where the distance is not terribly great, we are often shielded from one another by the windshields of our automobiles. By increasing the distance between people in the built environment, automobile-oriented development tends to decrease the intimacy that people can have with one another and their environments.³¹

Intimacy, ultimately, is what we are starved of in the American strip mall. In the brand-dominated and car-prioritized environments of today we no longer participate with the world we inhabit. We hardly have any excuse, be it intentional or circumstantial, to interact with each other in any other way than competition. So, it is made clear that underneath the relentless

³⁰ Jacobsen, Eric O. *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*. Baker Academic, 2012. Print. p. 30.

³¹ *The Space Between*. p. 42.

commodification of space America has experienced in the last half-century, there is a moral failure coupled with the growing distance between our experience of the manufactured world from the “God-given” natural world.

The force always working against commodification is our openness to the pure and simple experience of the world wherever it may be found. We inhabit these places through our noses, our ears, our eyes, and—maybe most of all—through our feet. Jacobsen writes of the importance of experience the world on foot,

One of the distinct advantages of navigating the built environment on foot rather than in an automobile is that more of your senses are engaged in moving through the environment...we tend to compensate for this lack of environmental stimulus by supplementing our experience with sophisticated entertainment systems for the interior space of our cars.³²

In the absence of rich participation with the natural world, we have anesthetized ourselves—especially our children—with advanced entertainment systems. The contrast between the almost wholly audio-visual world of the screen and the phenomenologically egalitarian world of the natural physical environment illustrates to us a deficit in which we devalue the nascent qualities of our bodies and our world. What Jacobsen is advocating for is a more whole experience of the world. He’s calling us to, like Doubting Thomas, be dissatisfied with simple images of the world and to go out and feel, with our bodies, the places we inhabit. Because when we don’t, our humanity itself is placed by the wayside. Jacobsen says of automobile-oriented development, “It may not have been an intended outcome, but the result of this tendency has been to express a rather low opinion of human beings.”³³

Beyond the modern phenomena of car-oriented development, studies have shown that another technology-inspired phenomena, that of high-rise living, also negatively affects brain development and experienced quality of life, especially in young children and the elderly. The authors of a study published in the *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* entitled *Housing and Health in Beijing: Implication of High-rise Housing on Children and the Aged* wrote, “Children’s lives in

³² Jacobsen, Eric O. *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*. Baker Academic, 2012. Print. p. 43.

³³ *The Space Between*. p. 45.

flats, especially in high-rise, contribute to the social isolation, which is common in modern cities and under the impact of which many families break down.”³⁴ Infants who live on lower floors actually scored higher on independent behaviors like greeting and potty training, than did those who lived on higher floors.³⁵

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Behind, or underneath, the image of the world lies a reality worthy of all of our senses; one that, if acknowledged, would create phenomenological equity within our bodies and minds. To discover this world, we must circumvent pacifying corporate products and turn, instead, to inhabiting the world through our bodies again. If we can begin by understanding that we share a human currency found in the goodness of the crisp autumn air, the quench of a drink of water, the comfort of warmth felt on our skin, or of being tired enough to sleep well, we would begin by recognizing the inherent dignity found in our bodies and the world alike. From that start, we’d be empowered to engage more holistically and compassionately with the environments we inhabit as well as with one another. As Makoto Fujimora offers in his book *Culture Care*,

Reminding people of our common life—that we are neighbors first—is a task of culture care. We acknowledge openly the borders of our groups and acknowledge too the legitimate things that divide us. Our responsibility, then, is to rehumanize this divide. An emphasis on our role as *neighbor* as part of our identity begins this process by reminding us of our shared cultural and geographical spaces, and the fact that proximity brings responsibility.³⁶

³⁴ Ekblad, Solvig and Werne, Finn. *Housing and Health in Beijing: Implications of High-rise Housing on Children and the Aged*, The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 4. 1990.

³⁵ Oda M, Taniguchi K, Wen M, Higurashi M. *Effects of High Rise Living on Physical and Mental Development of Children*. Journal of Human Ergology. 1989.

³⁶ Fujimura, Makoto. *Culture Care*. InterVarsity Press, 2017. Print.

The Particularity of Beauty

Cultivating Sensitivity

The way we learn something is more influential than the something that we learn. No content comes into our lives free-floating, it is always embedded in a form of some kind. For the basic and integrative realities of God and faith the forms must also be basic and integrative. If they are not, then the truths themselves will be peripheral and unassimilated.

Eugene Peterson

Returning to his home country from an academic excursion to China, Japanese priest and founder of Zen Buddhism, Myoan Eisai, brought back with him a way of preparing powdered green tea in which the matcha is first placed into a bowl where hot water is added, and a whisk is used to mix the ingredients together. This simple process became the basis for the Zen-inspired Japanese Tea Ceremony of *Sadō*, or The Way of Tea, in which full attention is given to every element employed in the making of tea as a sort of meditation on becoming present to the abundance of each moment. Each of the utensils used to heat, mix, and drink the tea; the order in which they are used; and the space that houses the ceremony are all meticulously curated components that are integral to the practice.

Sen no Rikyu, an influential tea-master in the 16th-Century noted that, “a meeting should always be treasured because it is a unique occasion that can never be reproduced.” The Japanese tea masters saw that beauty was not necessarily a deified ideal to be chasing, but something to be found in the practices and objects of everyday life.

Soestu Yanagi, a Japanese philosopher and founder of the *Mingei* (Folk-Craft) movement in Japan wrote of the tea masters, “By going beyond the visual to practical use, the tea masters

made deep inroads into the search for beauty. Their world was one of craft, not art. They gained their profound knowledge of beauty by seeking it in the utilitarian objects deeply rooted in life.”³⁷

In his book *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennet concludes his treatise on how the work of the hand informs the work of the mind by asserting that “equating the median with the mediocre legitimates neglect.”³⁸ This is to say, in the masses of things, people, or places we encounter, it can become easy to dismiss the complexity always apparent in our experience due to its seeming redundancy. Cleverly disguised and brushed off as normal, the everyday tasks of those who venture to plumb our toilets, bake our bread, or frame our houses is, in fact, a deep calling. Each task requires a unique awareness of the relevant techniques and variables involved in accomplishing the ambitions of the task, which in turn express themselves in new ways each day. Sennet is calling us, like the tea master, to pay due attention to the abundance of the present moment, the present conversation, the present task —because if we dismiss our quotidian tasks as mediocre, so quickly do we, too, dismiss our quotidian interactions with people as mundane.

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It would be beneficial to examine what the occurrence of beauty always holds in common, which is that the phenomena of beauty always has an association with *things*. Philosopher Elaine Scarry illustrates this simply when she says in her book *On Beauty*, “...while we know with relative ease what a beautiful horse or a beautiful man or possibly even a beautiful pot is, it is much more difficult to say what ‘Beauty’ unattached to any object is.”³⁹ There exists the relevant truth that beauty is a word we use to describe things, not a thing in and of itself. Beauty is to a beautiful thing as a good smell is to delicious food—it’s what delineates the threshold over which sound becomes music, not something apart from the site where it occurred. Scarry writes in the first chapter of her book that there will be “at no point...any aspiration to speak in these pages of unattached Beauty, or of the attributes of unattached Beauty.”⁴⁰ This is because “unattached

³⁷ Yanagi, Soetsu. *The Beauty of Everyday Things*. Penguin Classics, 2019. Print. p. 11.

³⁸ Sennett, Richard. *The Craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Print.

³⁹ Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999. Print.

⁴⁰ Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999. Print.

Beauty,” or the deification of beauty as a noun rather than an adjective, tempts us to look away from the world in front of us towards intellectual constructs that exist solely in our minds—and often at the expense of a shared life together. As Soetsu Yanagi put it, “To study the principles of beauty, it is necessary to come to this world, the world of ordinary things known to everyone.”⁴¹

Beauty and Nature

Beauty emerges out of many things, many people, and many places—it is not exclusive. This is a scandalous realization to the industrial imagination that desires to superimpose a supply and demand curve on all desirous things which we may “demand” that it might be sold for an ever growing sum. Likely, we have come to disembodify beauty in an attempt to commodify it—to make it rare and only for the few, inflating its value to be sold at higher and higher prices, equally elevating the social status of those who “produce” beauty to higher and higher strata. It is important to subvert the assumption that just because something is everywhere, or occurring all the time, it is somehow less significant. Because, as Makoto Fujimora notes in his book *Culture Care*, “when we are living in a mode of scarcity rather than generativity, we easily fall into viewing those outside as enemies locked in utter competition for commodities or power.”⁴²

In truth, the abundance of beauty makes it no less valuable. Instead, the abundance of beauty alludes to and allies itself with the greater living generosity present in the gifts of nature. In the New Testament, this is what Jesus is hinting at when he says,

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!⁴³

⁴¹ Yanagi, Soetsu. *The Beauty of Everyday Things*. Penguin Classics, 2019. Print. p. 47

⁴² Fujimura, Makoto. *Culture Care*. InterVarsity Press, 2017. Print.

⁴³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 200. Luke 12:24-28.

The danger of scarcity, and consequently competition, is reduction—an intrinsically dehumanizing and unnatural force. When we are afraid that there is not enough, it is easier to pin others, and ourselves, into generalized categories. These generalized categories neglect the flowering complexities at play in the common life we share together. As poet David Whyte states, “To reduce work in our societal imagination merely to competition, and to the act of beating the competition, is to condemn our societies, our communities and our individual lives to imaginative poverty of the very worst kind.”⁴⁴

This “imaginative poverty” has no energy to spend on recognizing the unique beauty in a neighbor, place, or object. It tempts us to create lazy caricatures of one another, reducing others into simplistic and nearsighted enemies that are easy to blame, as long as they are kept quiet.

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What always emerges out of an experience of beauty is affection. Affection being in affiliation with intimacy, love, or connection. Affection also almost always being expressed in care. Discovering beauty and paying careful attention become almost wholly synonymous.

Ultimately, this is the historical significance of the Christ story laid bare. The story of the Jewish Messiah, in essence, is that an invisible and disembodied—and therefore unknown and unknowable—God might one day enter into the flesh of the world to bridge the divide between creator and created. In the book of Isaiah, the messiah is prophesied as “Emmanuel,” which translates to “God with us.” In the messiah, God is finally given a name, a face, and a body and therefore is in solidarity with Their creation. It is in the particularity of the person of Jesus that the Christian story is significant—the Messiah is a whole new way of understanding God for the Hebrew people: God no longer dwells separate, above, or beyond the world, but embodied and present in it. Biblical translator and pastor Eugene Petersen writes, “the ideas, historical forces, and righteous causes that touch our lives must never remain or become abstract, but must be worked out with persons, persons with names.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Whyte, David. *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*. , 2015. Print. p. 244.

⁴⁵ Petersen, Eugene. *The Pastor: A Memoir*. HarperOne, 2011. Print.

In the globalized understanding of the world popular today, this is difficult. Especially in the midst of all of our “righteous causes.” Wendell Berry articulates this dilemma in his essay *Word and Flesh* regarding the paralyzing scale of Climate Change,

The word “planetary” refers to an abstract anxiety or an abstract passion that is desperate and useless exactly to the extent that it is abstract. How, after all, can anybody—any particular body—do anything to heal a planet?...In fact, though we now have serious problems nearly everywhere on the planet, we have no problem that can accurately be described as planetary....The problems, if we describe them accurately, are all private and small. Or they are so initially. The problems are our lives.⁴⁶

While the scale of our problems today do necessitate engagement at both macro and micro levels, to be effective we must always descend into the particular if we are to accurately establish the parameters of our problems as well as the beginnings of their solutions. Poet David Whyte offers us a way to do this, not so much in a plan of action that dictates *what to do*, but instead a way of *how to be*; a position or relationship to the world:

What we recognize and applaud as honesty and transparency in an individual is actually the humble demeanor of the apprentice, someone paying extreme attention, to themselves, to others, to life, to the next step...someone who does not have all the answers but who is attempting to learn what they can...someone like everyone else, wondering what they and their society are about to turn into.⁴⁷

To become this apprentice, we must remain sensitive and endeavor each day to further cultivate our sensitivity to the circumstances and people in our lives. We must resist the temptation to categorize or assume in lump sum deductions. The humble demeanor of the apprentice dictates holistic awareness of all of the variables at play, ever-reluctant to stray into the realms of habit or assumption. In regards to our naive, albeit natural, impulse towards abstraction, the wisdom of the Tao Te Ching warmly offers an alternative way,

⁴⁶ Berry, Wendell. *Word and Flesh* from *What Are People For?* San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990. Print. p. 198.

⁴⁷ Whyte, David. *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*. , 2015. Print. p. 201.

So in myself I see what self is,
in my household I see what family is,
in my town I see what community is,
in my nation I see what a country is,
in the world I see what is under heaven.

How do I know the world is so?
By this.⁴⁸

Beauty and Sincerity

In the discipline of architecture, we have deified figures like Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright who saw themselves as masters of space and time, designing big solutions to big societal problems through abstracted visions of utopia. But we might learn from the rebellious essay written by the Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck that he wrote in response to the grandiose self-image touted by characters immortalized in architectural legend. He wrote, “Where ever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more.”

Drawing the distinction between the human manifestation of space as *place*, and time as *occasion*, Van Eyck is getting us to look at what is really important: what is *here* and in our experience. To see the world in front of us plainly, unfiltered by abstraction or assumption, is to discover something that remains elusive and hidden from those that insist on layering reality with commentary, competition, and abstraction. These abstractions only serve to muddy our perception of reality, hiding the nature of things as they are and qualifying them through language or concepts. If we can work to see with eyes unfettered by these filters, we might come into seeing the expansive preciousness of the world in front of us. This is the same phenomena that inspired poet William Blake to write, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, all would appear as it is: infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Laozi, Guin U. K. Le, and Jerome P. Seaton. *Tao Te Ching: A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way*. 1997. Print.

⁴⁹ Blake, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. London: Camden Hotten, 1868. Print.

Continued exposure to beautiful things has a cleansing effect on our perception. Instances of beauty can accrue in our psyche over time and slowly transform us into more focused lenses, seeing ever more clearly the things that interest and awe us. As we are in the presence of, and participate in the making of, beautiful things we are continuously and infinitely refined by that beauty towards a more acute expression of the things that we admire. Simultaneously, we become increasingly attuned to the taste of things that are not beautiful. The dissonance between actions and creations that do not cohere with our experiences of beauty begins to grow and our vision is able to articulate ever more clearly that which is beautiful, and also the not yet beautiful derivations of those things.

Soetsu Yanagi argued that the sensitivity to beauty in our modern era has become atrophied due to the societal elevation of the individualistic artist as well as the industrial manufacturing of objects that we use everyday in our homes. He writes in his 1934 essay, *What is Mingei?*,

...our aesthetic sense has been severely impaired owing to the fact that beauty and life are treated as separate realms of being...confining beauty to visual appreciation and excluding the beauty of practical objects has proven to be a grave error on the part of modern man.⁵⁰

Yanagi mentions time and again throughout his writing that the root of this “grave error” is a false distinction between life and beauty—or the notion that beauty is somehow reserved for the arts and not to be found in the everyday things of common life. This fallacy reinforces our dissociation from one another and the natural world by obscuring the abundant beauty present in abundant things—for if beauty is something that only happens in museums, or only the product of genius, how could we not be pacified into a lukewarm participation with the world that we inhabit every day?

There is a Shaker verse that says, “Love of Beauty has a wider field of action in association with Moral Force.”⁵¹ The Shakers recognized the affiliation between beauty and truth, and that what is true is ultimately resonant with a broader moral goodness. The French philosopher and

⁵⁰ Yanagi, Soetsu. *The Beauty of Everyday Things*. Penguin Classics, 2019. Print. p. 11.

⁵¹ Andrews, Edward Deming and Faith. *Shaker Furniture: The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect*. Yale University Press, 1937.

activist Simone Weil agreed saying, “The love of the beauty of the world...involves...the love of all the truly precious things that bad fortune can destroy. The truly precious things are those forming ladders reaching toward the beauty of the world, openings into it.”⁵² Presence to beauty, accessed through the ever-increasing awareness of “truly precious things,” has the capacity to focus our gaze on each other and the things we set about making, inherently disallowing the mistreatment and objectification of one another. This is the ladder that reaches toward the beauty of the world.

⁵² Weil, Simone. *Waiting on God*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1951. Print.

Part II

A Kindred Sense of Obligation

Hands to Work, Hearts to God

Labor to make the way of God your own, let it be your inheritance, your treasure, your occupation, your daily calling

Mother Ann Lee
Founder of The Shakers

In few other moments of modern history has there been such a concerted or successful effort in arranging the material and relational environment of the human experience as in The Shaker villages of the mid-19th century. The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, more commonly known as The Shakers, practiced their work as worship, saw equal value in men and women through acknowledged mutual necessity, and organized around central values that allowed them to amalgamate their spiritual imaginations with their physical surroundings. Individual Shaker sisters and brothers were inseparable parts of a whole; they owned land in common, had minimal personal possessions, and brought a devout heart to trade work that produced useful things for the benefit of their society. As Edward and Faith Andrews wrote in their history of Shaker craft,

...even the shops and farms were sanctified parts of the church society, where aspiration was transmuted into accomplishment. The idea of worship in work was at once a doctrine and a daily discipline. Labor was consecrated service, performed as in a holy place.⁵³

⁵³ Andrews, Edward Deming and Faith. *Shaker Furniture: The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect*. Yale University Press, 1937.

These values amounted in an uncompromising dedication to the Christian Gospel and to one another. Time and again in their Doctrinal literature they understood themselves as “debtors to God in relation to Each other, and all people, to improve our time and Talents in this Life, in that manner in which we might be most useful.”⁵⁴ These beliefs kindled a responsibility and joy for the Shaker brothers and sisters that was focused on one another’s welfare. The Shaker communities had twelve foundational pillars: faith, hope, honesty, continence, innocence, simplicity, meekness, humility, prudence, patience, thankfulness, and charity. On these values—in service to God—the Shakers were built.

Their particular brand of communalism was a logical conclusion to their pursuit of “true Gospel simplicity.” In Acts 4, after the freshly resurrected Jesus ascends to heaven, he leaves his disciples to carry on the good work that he begun. In service of a common revelation, Jesus’ disciples begin to practically work out the radical spiritual experience they just had with the one they believed to be the Son of God. A description of that earliest church is given,

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.⁵⁵

In the first recorded covenant adopted by the Shakers, the duty felt by the authors was not “to gather and lay up an Interest of this World’s goods; But [that] we become possessed by Honest Industry, more Than for our own support, to bestow to Charitable uses, for the relief of the poor, and otherwise as the Gospel might require.”⁵⁶ The Shakers’ convictions were born out of that first sincere expression of what church could truly mean and they desired to generate that same level of authenticity and single-heartedness. They wanted to earnestly work out how they might bring everything they knew of Heaven to Earth.

⁵⁴ Collection of authors. *Order and Covenant of a Church in Gospel Order*. New Lebanon, 1795.

⁵⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 200. Acts 4: 32-35.

⁵⁶ Andrews, Edward Deming and Faith. *Shaker Furniture: The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect*. Yale University Press, 1937.

The Shakers separated themselves from society to pursue the perfection of a particular part of the world so that Jesus might have a place where he'd feel at home when he came back. To do this, the Shakers uncompromisingly pursued holiness and sacrament in every moment of their day. From chores, to prayers, to the joiner's bench, nothing was outside of the realm of devotion. Through an organized vocational calendar, they were able to produce everything that they needed as a society away from the manufacturing capacity of the "worldly" society. They worked jobs in tandem with one another to keep skills and interests diversified, as well as to ensure that no one became too covetous or prideful in their work. In everything they did, they aimed to channel their worship into useful, simple, and graceful expressions, as the Truth of God was all of these things in their eyes.

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Who were these revolutionary and chaste brothers and sisters that were united in living so harmoniously with one another? In part, they were widows, orphans, or societal castaways in one form or another. Certain historical variables converged to give rise to the Shakers flourishing—and subsequent rapid decline.

Governmental social services of the mid-1800s were weak. The larger American Society didn't have strong safety nets or alternate plans available should someone find themselves down and out. The Shakers, however, could fully take care of their own independent of the surrounding society. As such, the colloquialism of "Winter Shaker" emerged. A "Winter Shaker" was someone who didn't have the resources to sustain themselves and, anxious about the forthcoming cold weather of winter, would go and devoutly convert to Shakerism to get shelter, food, and work if only for a few months and then run back off as Spring came around the corner and temperatures rose.

Although "Winter Shakers" may be a derogatory term, it speaks to the Shaker's capacity to care for those that have slipped through the cracks of the conventional industrial economy. Poor families who couldn't afford to take care of their children would give their young ones to the Shaker communities because they knew they could be trusted to feed, raise, and teach their sons and daughters. When any given Shaker was 17, they had a choice to stay or go, having done their

service to the community as contributors to the labor force. Those who were given to the Shakers as children could return to their families, or stay in the Shaker community, or go and practice business independently now that they were trained and equipped with a practical skill.

The way that the Shakers did business proved enough to sustain and encourage more and more to partner their lives to the Shaker mission. The combination of affordable housing, trade education, and spiritual fostering proved a successful combination and allowed the Shakers to holistically serve a great many Americans. Eventually, after the Civil War, government services were expanded in the new Union and it became less and less necessary for widows and orphans to go and find work with the Shakers. Converts were harder to come by and the Shaker numbers continued to dwindle as corporations grew and cities developed in the 20th Century.

Since its inception, the Shaker population has much diminished and left only a faithful few remaining brothers and sisters. The Sabbathday Lake Shaker Community, the last surviving communal sect, denies that Shakerism was a failed utopian experiment simply because it no longer exists in such a size. Their message, surviving over two centuries, is still as relevant as ever.

Shakerism is not, as many would claim, an anachronism; nor can it be dismissed as the final sad flowering of 19th century liberal utopian fervor. Shakerism has a message for this present age—a message as valid today as when it was first expressed. It teaches above all else that God is Love and that our most solemn duty is to show forth that God who is love in the World.⁵⁷

A Preferential Option for the Poor

On celibacy, a brother wrote wittingly in an 1874 publication, “for if man multiplies, he must divide; and an endless series of division and isolated interests must exist.”⁵⁸ At the heart of celibacy is a constant reckoning with what one understands to be “enough.” This was ever-present in the mind of Shaker: what is it that I truly need? The answer to that question, whether

⁵⁷ Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village. *Principles and Beliefs*. <https://www.maineshakers.com/beliefs/>

⁵⁸ Pellman, R. W. *A Shaker's Answer to the Oft-Repeated Question, "What Would Become of the World If All Should Become Shakers?"* Boston, 1874, pp 20-21.

sincere itself or practiced in sincerity, was a resounding, “God is all I need.” To remove all of the excess infatuations and deceptions inherent in their passions liberated them to discover the deep and pure articles of their faith. They pursued simplicity to find the essence of things, unbound by fleeting desire and to get at the heart of the world they removed fabricated layers of “mine” or “yours” so that they could see things as they truly were. In 1904 Eldress Anna White wrote it plainly, “Are you free as you are? Are you in any degree bound by your appetites, your passions, your self-will? Are you at all in bondage to the opinion of our neighbors, to the customs and notions of society, however harmful or absurd? These do not trammel the true Shaker.”⁵⁹

To be free from their passions also meant to be free from the insecurity and hunger of material greed. The Economy, to the Shakers, was not an organism to be fed or power to be gained or anything other than themselves. Economy was what existed between them, spiritually and commercially, connecting them in relationship and reinforcing their mutual necessity of one another.

Our modern economy has shared few, if any, of these ambitions; unless it could be qualified that our shared spiritual imagination is to breed endless, cheap things at the cost of the environment from which they were born. The absolute economics of our economy insists that there be winners and losers inherent in a competitive market. Producers of things are incentivized to produce more at less financial cost, and users of things are increasingly reduced to simpleton “consumers” who know not what they do—and should not be encouraged to either.

What did manage to survive of The Shaker’s innovations, however, was their humble and articulate aesthetic language. From the Danish Modernists Hans Wegner and Børge Mogensen, to the revolutionary furniture maker George Nakashima, all cited the elegance and clarity of the Shakers’ forms as inspiration. In their material culture, they expressed their faith in the goodness of the world, the sacrament of their labor, and exquisite care for the details involved in their craft.

Furnishing Utopia is a modern-day design collective that has taken inspiration from the Shakers to produce goods that mirror Shaker values of simplicity, utility, and grace. In a brief for their latest exhibition *Hands to Work* they state,

⁵⁹ Eldress Anna White. *The Shakers; Hands to Work Hearts to God*. 1904.

The theme of chores, conventionally understood as tedious, burdensome work to be avoided, reexamines our concepts of these activities and the tools related to them, proposing a renewed sense of engagement between humans, objects and their environment in the pursuit of a more virtuous way of living through ritualizing the mundane, with the potential for clearing one's mind, connecting with one's body and confronting the indifference of the natural world.⁶⁰

Their work alludes to the Shakers as “the first minimalists,” recognizing that the Shakers expressed contemporary values of formal simplicity and material honesty well before The Modernists ever got around to it.

If you were to ask a Shaker brother or sister about the importance of their work, however, they might reinforce that the divine influence on their work doesn't impact so much *what* they make, but *how* they make it. Artisanship was itself the sacrament to God, the products generated are merely a consequence of a devout engagement with the process. Although visually congruent with many of today's design impulses, reducing the Shakers to a style is a naive interpretation of the deep convictions the Shakers lived out.

The products of the Shakers are unpretentiously oriented around processes of use and production. Their furniture design focused on being accessible for cleaning, being durable, and light for the ease of carrying. Fashion and design blogs tout the minimalism of Shakers as “trend-proof decorating ideas.”⁶¹ Somewhere in Heaven, Shaker brothers and sisters are bemoaning that the outpouring of their lives is now considered as “decorating ideas.” On the new commercial attention and success of Shaker Style furniture, a Shaker Sister mentioned, “Our furniture is very fashionable all of a sudden you know...we've always been told how beautiful our things are. I don't say they aren't, but that isn't what they were meant to be...All our furniture has ever meant to be was strong, light and above all, practical.”⁶²

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⁶⁰ Furnishing Utopia. *Hands to Work*. 2018. <http://furnishing-utopia.com/previous-exhibitions>

⁶¹ Apartment Therapy. *Shaker Style: A Key to Timeless Home Design*. 2017. https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/beautiful-examples-of-shaker-style-in-the-home-241435?utm_source=pinterest&utm_medium=tracking&utm_campaign=inline-img-share

⁶² Burks, Jean M. *Shaker Design: Out of This World*. 2008. Print. p. XVII.

The ability and resilience the Shakers had within their own community to house, feed, and educate marginalized members of society is arguably their most significant accomplishment. Beyond the beauty of their furniture or the devoutness of their faith, their commitment to serve one another—in ever widening and inclusive circles—was the permeating power that changed lives. Imagine, if in today’s society—preoccupied with affluence and competition—a movement emerged of a community committed to each other through mutual necessity?

The ability to produce things that we can buy without selling the world in exchange has remained a conundrum in the modern consumer economy. Everything we now have, we’ve bought; and everything we buy has been made or distributed by a machine; and those machines have been powered by the commodification of large swaths of the planet whether it be by coal mines, oil wells, or suburban sprawl. The profound recess of joy and meaning that our culture is currently experiencing is arguably consequent of our “freedom” from an engaged practice of work. Edward and Faith Andrews write in their survey of Shaker furniture, “The peculiar correspondence between Shaker culture and Shaker artisanship should be seen as the result of the penetration of the spirit into all secular activity.”⁶³ Beginning to let our spiritual convictions into our quotidian activities may empower us with a path to combat our disintegrating social machine.

The Shakers found beauty in the practice of living and saw the use and manufacture of everyday objects as a sacred pursuit to empower all human life with divine meaning. Integrating vocation and community, the Shakers centered their lives around the work of their hands and participated in a society that strived for equity among all of its members, advocating for humility, simplicity, and interdependence in all things. They exhibited a deep understanding of all the of the truths we explored in Part I: they found joy in their work, they were aware of the goodness of the world, and they expressed and explored beauty through the particular things that they made in the particular way that they made them.

⁶³ Andrews, Edward Deming and Faith. *Shaker Furniture: The Craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect*. Yale University Press, 1937. p 22.

Part III

Making a Way

After exploring all of the authors and ideas we have covered thus far—which solely as ideas are all well and good—we arrive at the challenge of manifesting them into the shared physical world. Pursuing this is oxymoronic—we have advocated for a perspective, not a product. Yet a made thing, as that is the subject we’ve been discussing, is an opportunity to exhibit, touch, and experience this perspective in material itself. Jacob Needleman says of the Shakers in *Lost Christianity*,

There is a very strong sense of inner search in the Shakers. At the same time, there is a great care, manifested in their crafts, for something that can express itself outwardly. You get the impressions of an attempt to engage the whole self in an outward action, which has an extraordinary imprint that you can feel in the products themselves.⁶⁴

Like the Shakers, this is the simple but difficult thing we are trying to do here: express our inner search outwardly and with great care. My own inner search to this point has led me to assemble this collection of ideas, but as these are all ideas there is no one set solution to how they might be worked out in practice. The important part being, however, that they are, in practice, worked out.

The aims of any project proposition that would be based on our study should be:

- Participate more actively with the surrounding material environment
- Circumvent industrially produced things
- Enjoy using our bodies
- Spend more time together
- Pursue beauty

⁶⁴ Needleman, Jacob. *Lost Christianity*. Penguin Classics, 2003.

In simple terms, these express many of the sentiments of the authors we've cited. Whatever moves we make, if we can do these things in small measure, we inch towards the world they believed in and admired: a world populated by empowered, individual agents who participate thoughtfully with others and their environments in good humor and towards the making of beautiful things.

Inspired by the frugal craftsmanship of the Shakers, the quotidian sacrament of the Japanese Tea Ceremony, and the autonomy sought in agrarian convictions, we would be inclined to build some form of a *chashitsu*—or a teahouse—to display and practice these values in real time and space. This small, dedicated structure should be made largely out of the materials from the place on which it stands to embody in its construction—both in process and product—an intrinsic tie to the locality. A multi-sensorial experience to be experienced with friends, like a table on which to share a meal, should be fundamentally integrated into the structure to participate in “domesticating endless time” through architecture. In this place, those participating in the meal could experience the material reality of the region from which its construction emerged, and interact with the place with all of their senses engaged—smell, sight, sound, taste, and touch. Populated by various found and created objects from its furniture to utensils, it could be a case-study on slowing down, on paying attention to what's around us, and cultivating sensitivity outside of pretense.

Importantly, as emphasizing process has been at the heart of this investigation, everything would contribute to this small structure must be made by hand, or else be an object made by industrial means but recycled and used towards alternative ends. The financial cost should be next to none to show the creative capacity we have as individuals outside of conventional economics. Sourcing material and objects outside of the broader market place will inform a clever and crafty eye towards the resources that we use and would otherwise take for granted. Referring to those same taken-for-granted resources, access to centrally distributed electricity should be little to none, emphasizing again the capacity of any given set of human hands. Complex manufactured tools may be used, such as the back-saw, rabbiting plane, or the bit and brace; but energy from outside of our somatic ability must be limited.

If made well, this place might inspire other communities to set about making their own teahouses, all unique expressions of the locales and hands that conspired in their becoming. Following these simple, but very challenging guidelines, a network of these small public spaces

might facilitate broader cultural conversation about the worth of work, the why of resources, and “the dignity engrained in the human body.”⁶⁵

A Certain Patch of Sky

The site for the tea house was donated by a generous friend, Rob Sweeney, who offered to host the project on his property surrounded by small woods and marshland in Kingston, NY. In conversation, we experimented with different locations on his property, noting their relative proximity to potential building materials, public access, and light conditions. This play between location, material access, and time (pressed by an impending thesis deadline) created a pressurized fulcrum at the beginning of the process where any creative possibility was immediately bound to what it was going to be made out of. *Should we gather material first to figure out what we can build with? Or should we think of what to build first, so that we know what material to gather?*

Having no clear answer to these questions, we began by pursuing both avenues in tandem. We hypothesized the exact location as we began to cut down a gathering of trees that were of relative diameter and scale. Being of similar size, we knew that whatever use they’d eventually be put to, they would at least be of uniform dimension within a tolerance, which would make them easier to use and plan with. We initially cut down young trees of various species—cedar, white pine, elm, and pin oak—unsure of how we were going to employ the advantages of each in the design. We ambitiously cut down a cedar tree much larger than the others we planned to gather, in case we needed to span a greater distance than was possible with the smaller trees, but after trying to move the felled giant we quickly reevaluated what was going to be possible for the rest of the project.

The only species in the area that we could find a greater number of similarly-sized specimens was pin oak. Pin oak is unfortunately more closely related to rot-prone red oak than to its more desirable and rot-resistant cousin white oak, but with limits on time and access we had to move forward and take precautions elsewhere.

Felling the trees was an education on many fronts. It was hard not to wince as I cut into young, still growing trees solely for my own ends. It exposed what felt like vanity in the project—

⁶⁵ Sennet, Richard. *The Craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Print.

was what we were building more valuable than the lives these trees were living previously undisturbed? Does this part of the world really need more architecture at such a cost of living things? Despite the seeming abundance in the forest, the first few days of harvesting laid bare the fragility of the scene we so admired when we first began to cut. A tree now a stump, a slew of shattered branches from the felling of others around it—what was once a pristine and dense part of the forest is now a clearing littered with broken branches and debris. By taking even the few select trees that we did, we damaged so many others around it whose canopies were intertwined with our building materials to be.

That evening I sat in the clearing we had made and took note of the palpable feeling of loss for the next time something might be needed. I was met the same harsh reckoning I've experienced when I've killed an animal for its meat—something that has subsequently caused me to eat meat less freely. In our modern economy, the costs of our actions are one of the dilemmas we pay to be oblivious to when we buy industrially produced products—be it for building or for eating—in super markets and big box stores. Surely far fewer people would eat as much meat if they had to kill all of the animals they ate themselves.



Once we had a modest collection of trees, I proceeded to hesitantly lay plans as we de-limbed, de-barked, and sorted our inventory of material. The site (a small but obvious break in a grouping of large white pine trees near Sweeney's house), provided strict but welcome parameters on the scale for the structure. Having real, stubborn limits to respond to was positive as we weren't exactly sure what we'd be making as we began to make it.

Knowing that the structure should fundamentally revolve around the table to emphasize the experience of eating together, we started laying out posts relative to a comfortable dimension for a table. These posts would be the support for both the table as well as the roof so that the two elements intrinsically tied, one not able to exist without the other.



Conversely to the scarcity of manageably sized timber, Sweeney's property happened to be bounded by a population of the large invasive reed phragmites. Noting the abundance of this material, we had established early on that integrating phragmites into the design could have the dual purpose of both easy access to a resource as well as clearing a pesky plant from encroaching further on Sweeney's land. As we began building in the lat spring, the growth from the previous year was standing dead in 8'-14' tall groves. We cut and gathered them into bundles to be able to mock-up in 1:1 scale the form our structure might take.

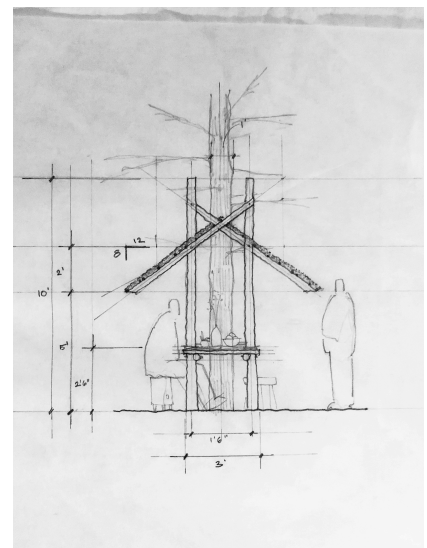
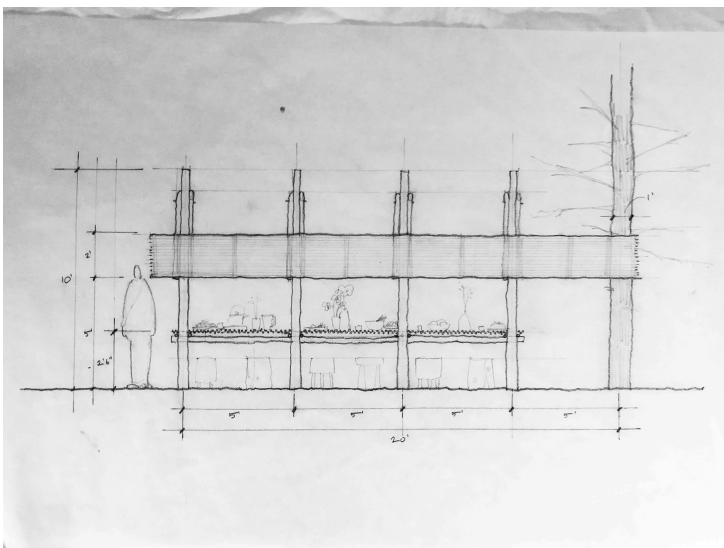
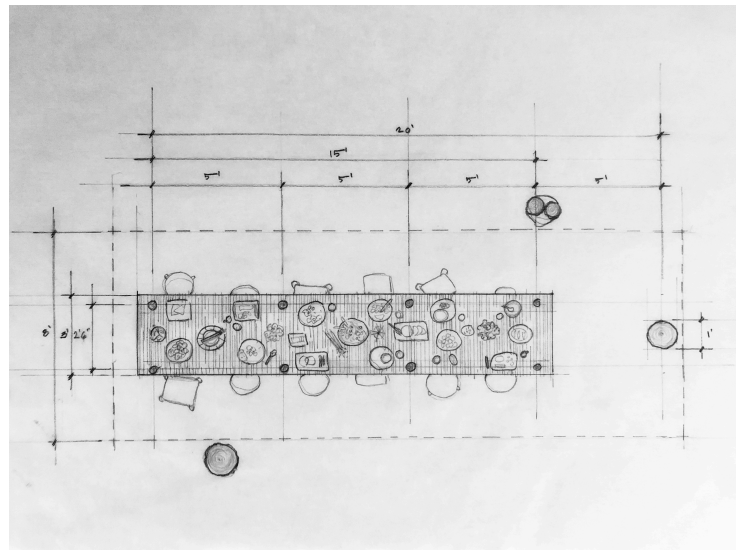
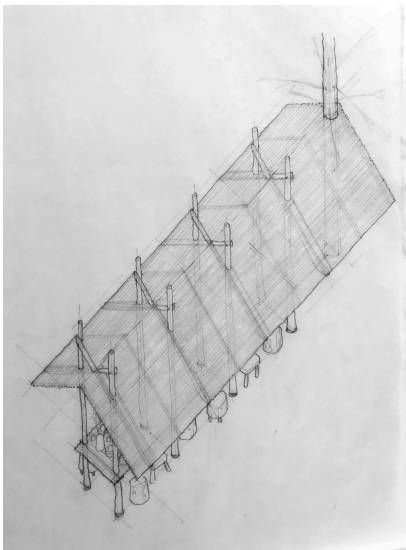




Once the design began to materialize, we slowly moved forward discovering the details for joining members only as we needed to join them. As the posts needed to support both the table and the roof—and having limited material to employ—we decided to run the rafters long, one on each side of the structural bay, to be able to fasten them on each post in a diagonal. This would create an “X” that would keep the posts laterally rigid without the need for a ridge beam or a third horizontal structural member where a collar-tie might normally be required. The rafters could then cantilever out towards the eave—a possibility only if the roof was made out of an exceedingly light material. To join the members, we chose a simple half-lap joint that would create a flat surface on one piece to rest more firmly on the round of its reciprocating piece. These then were fastened with a 1” oak peg foraged from leftover branches.

A feedback loop of information, where process is constantly informing product, is only possible when there is an active solidarity between the planner and the builder—obviously even more so if they are the same person. There’s a circuitous path of circumstance and resistance that has consequences for how something is able to get done. This is largely missing information in my experience of learning architecture, where the plan exists in isolation as if it is the only thing that matters. However, the actual application of the plan, if we’re open to it, is always informing and appropriating the actual manifestation of that plan. The product is dictated by the process of how it's made.

As we inched forward, only able to assemble one bent each day, the design began to reveal its logic and palette. In initial conversation, we had thought to use the phragmites as thatch material to bundle and layout over the substructure. It became immediately apparent, however, that the amount of material needed to properly thatch a roof, even thinly, would take days more of harvesting and a more materially-efficient solution should be explored. After clearing a plot of phragmites, we began to experiment with weaving them into screened panels that we could layout on top of our timbers. Using the full width of each phragmites in a weave would allow us to cover more horizontal area than if we bundled them to build thickness vertically in a thatched pattern.



After we completed the construction of the timber structure, the spanning purlin members that were fastened on to the rafters were much more crooked than I had anticipated when I was drawing sections. It became clear that superimposing a flat plane in the form of a woven panel on top of these irregular and out-of-plane members would emphasize and expose how out of square the structure actually was. This was a battle I had been trying to fight all along: trees don't grow in straight lines. Not having industrially processed building materials, or a powered jointer or planer at our disposal, the trees were inevitably irregular and difficult to rein in to the straight lines I had been drawing. We made adjustments where we could, but we found that being the mill, lumber yard, designers, and builders forced a certain inefficiency into our process. The greater economic ecology that allows for the aggregation of participation in a kind of relay race of material from forest to building is not to be overlooked, though it clearly has allowed for the difficulty of each process to be overlooked by its constituents.

But this could also be an opportunity. If we wove the phragmites directly into the structure, the irregularity of the sticks underneath would be obscured in a field of crisscrossing phragmites. A series of weaving patterns was explored to test the relationships between strength, utility, and ease of construction. Noting that the pine trees above would be constantly raining down their needles, weaving a tighter pattern would help to shed the needles off to prevent them from catching on the exposed purlins—however, weaving every other phragmites would take an incredible amount of time. Weaving the phragmites 3 at a time was an appropriate solution that shed the needles, while reducing the amount of times we'd have to go back to grab the next wefting material.



The table remained unresolved until the final hour. Knowing that this was going to be the centerpiece of the structure, I kept sketching and iterating as long as was possible while continuing construction on the rest of the project. After experimenting with a number of potential materials and designs for the table, we settled with the simplest solution: use the shorter, broken pieces of the phragmites we had gathered to create a woven mat for the table surface. This would allow for a unity between the roof and the table, and create a monochromatic backdrop to contrast with the table setting to emphasize the populated activity of the eventual meal.



Once the structure was completed, we set about making seating and having conversations about how much we had learned along the way. Surely, if we were to do it again, we would do it differently knowing the complexities and difficulties to which we subjected ourselves with certain decisions. Building the timer bents on the ground would have been easier than assembling them in the air, if we would have only taken more precaution to level out the holes we dug. I would have harvested the phragmites more carefully if we had known we needed long, unbroken pieces to weave the roof. We noted the emergent skills that we had passively acquired over the course of the project, the things that we first did with great difficulty, but then eventually became common place tasks.

These lessons, if they can be called that, developed out the possibility of designing and making *simultaneously*. If we were to continue to design and make, these lessons would be integrated into following projects, diminishing issues through substantiated experience.



E P I L O G U E

With the right work, the right relationship to that work and the mystery of what its continually being revealed to us through our endeavors, we find a home in the world that eventually does not need debilitating stress, does not need our exhausted will, and does not need enormous amounts of outside energy to constantly fed in to sustain it.

David Whyte

Underneath and throughout this study, we've essentially been talking about learning. Learning to live in the world with more than just our eyes, learning how to relate to the environment and one another more holistically, and consequently unlearning all of the inherited biases that lead us to cheapen our interaction with the abundance present in each moment. However, as Wendell Berry concludes his essay *Economy and Pleasure*, "...this issue is personal and so needs to be re-examined by everybody. The argument, if it is that, can proceed only by personal testimony."⁶⁶ Advocating for the beauty and meaning inherent in the world has no merit if others are not able to discover and explore the resonance of these qualities for themselves. Without explicit personal experience, truth remains unassimilated and unaffiliated from the world in which individuals live out their every day. But the truths we've discussed have little and lessening opportunity to be discovered in the popular culture that dominates today.

⁶⁶ Berry, Wendell. *Economy and Pleasure* from *What Are People For?* San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990. Print. p. 141.

Jesuit spiritual teacher Anthony DeMello teaches that, “growth is only possible through a willingness to think the unfamiliar.”⁶⁷ So, then, how do we make available the opportunities for a person to think the unfamiliar in a society that encourages us so often towards intellectual and habitual homogeneity?

To start, we have to break the false binary that’s been drawn between the body and the mind that has bound our experience primarily to the visual realm. Ultimately, this has invited the commodification of our attention through screens and delegitimized our bodies through the degradation of manual labor. This could surely be done in a myriad of ways, but helping people learn to make things with their hands out of natural materials is one of these environments that would allow unfamiliar thinking to emerge.

In conventional education settings, the multiple modes through which we navigate the world are often neglected. We reduce the depth of our somatic and emotional intelligences by submitting them under a simple intellectual dimension. Fostering our mind, heart, and body in unison might lead towards greater health by deepening the engagement individuals have with the world they live in. In being so engaged, any person might learn to cherish, value, and cleverly participate with their circumstances comparable to the intimacy between the craftsperson and their materials that always lead them towards greater care, substantive innovation, and products of high quality.

Philosopher Elaine Scarry characterizes the role of a student as “One [who] submits oneself to other minds (teachers) in order to increase the chance that one will be looking in the right direction when a comet makes its sweep through a certain patch of sky.”⁶⁸ The humble attention of the Scarry’s student is the same as David Whyte’s apprentice we noted earlier: someone paying extreme attention. Humility is exercised, and often unwittingly discovered, in the learning of any difficult skill. The university classroom, then, shares with the workshop an ambition towards cultivating sensitivity, but arguably the workshop does this better, as instead of striving to do something well to appease a professor’s rote requirements, the craftsperson is allegiant always to both the object in question as well as the person who might one day come to

⁶⁷ De Mello, Anthony. De Mello Spirituality Center. <https://www.demellospirituality.com/tonys-essential-message/>

⁶⁸ Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. Print. p. 7.

own it. There are stakes in the game. These stakes draw literal connections between people and necessitate an adaptive and careful attention from the craftsman.

Paradoxically, in this “high-stakes” environment where oversights have an actual physical consequence, there emerges a wider berth for failure. Failure becomes our greatest teacher as we investigate and interrogate the materials we are working with. The way we learn any craft skill is most notably through a trial and error process that feeds information into the intelligence of our hands and minds simultaneously. This is the phenomena that woodworker and teacher Gary Rogowski names as “forgiveness.”⁶⁹ In trying to complete difficult physical tasks, we have to become familiar with the limits of our own ability as individuals, and forgive them. As we become more comfortable with our own failure, always cognizant of its underlying generosity in education, we might become more comfortable with the failure of others and have compassion for their shortcomings or innocent lack of knowledge in any given subject.

What we’re trying to do is hard—that must never be forgotten. It is often the assumption that one knows what one is doing that leads to so many more dangerous mistakes—both physically and relationally. As the Tao Te Ching offers, “...taking things too lightly makes them worthless, and taking things too easy makes them hard, the wise soul, by treating the easy as hard, doesn’t find anything hard.”⁷⁰ That is to say, bring the same attention to the easy things as to the difficult things, and in so doing the difficult thing becomes only as hard to do as the easy thing. One is no longer making assumptions, but is humbly engaged with task at hand.

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In my experience of higher education, joy is something that we have often discounted as being trivial or peripheral, but joy has a fundamental and formative influence on the ways that we approach design and each other. It’s the non-joyful person that takes more than they need from a place, or builds bigger than they need, or refuses to listen to another’s ideas.

I’ve come to see this kind of joy as essential. Making things with our hands is enjoyable and we’d do well not to underestimate the significance of that. Participating actively with our physical

⁶⁹ Rogowski, Gary. *Handmade: Creative Focus in the Age of Distraction*. Linden Publishing, 2017. Print.

⁷⁰ Laozi, Guin U. K. Le, and Jerome P. Seaton. *Tao Te Ching: A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way*. 1997. Print. 63.

environment makes us not necessarily better designers, but necessarily better stewards of both the environments that we make, as well as take from in our making. In an age defined by extraction over contribution, expressed now in overwhelming problems of climate change and distressing cultural unrest, returning to the small and required tasks of our lives relates us more holistically to time, place, and mutual necessity. These tasks could be cooking more, growing your own vegetables, making your own wooden spoon, remodeling your own kitchen, changing the oil in your own car, or trying for an earnest moment to understand and repair an issue with broken equipment before reflexively calling someone else to come fix it. Each of these simple chores has within them a larger moral education regarding thrift, autonomy, patience, stewardship, and curiosity. We must strive to have room for the small, seemingly inconsequential things in our lives that we've become so accustomed to ignoring or covering over with scalable sums of money. Without these things, dissociation expands between our experience and our world—whether that be the natural world or the worlds of other people—and we become alienated from a shared human currency that is always quietly advocating for the common and unassuming necessities of being alive.

I don't believe that the line of thinking that we've explored necessitates that we all make everything that we use in our homes ourselves, or that everyone in architecture school be required to design and build a timber-frame structure using only hand tools. I do, however, believe that exactly to the degree that we are able to introduce more active material participation with what's around us, we will discover in similar measure inner dimensions of our humanity that have largely remained dormant in our modern, technology-dominated epoch. That's not to say, "Throw away all computers!" but instead to widen the reigning dearth of participating voices in our everyday and include with the computer a set of whetstones for taking care of our kitchen knives, or to become acquainted with the local, edible wild plants that are growing in any given locale. Try to find ways to bring things out of the abstract and into the particular. Try to find deeper relationships with the people, places, and things around you. This is the task of any of us if we are trying to be sincerely engaged with what's around us: *pay attention*.