

Craft

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Thomas Edison is credited with saying that ‘Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration’, suggesting thus that having a creative idea is not the only thing that matters, there is also a lot of hard work involved. He was, in this way, responding to popular beliefs that consider insight the real mark of the genius. In fact, the first conceptions of creativity were actually based on the idea of divine inspiration (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999) and the Ancient Greeks, for instance, metaphorically pointed to the muses as the source of true creation. While this image actually locates creativity outside of the person, it was following the Renaissance that genius became ‘internalised’ as biological and hereditary (Montuori & Purser, 1995). Today, such extreme views are avoided but the ethos of attributing creative qualities to the individual continues in research focused on creativity and intelligence, personality, thinking styles, neurological correlates, and so on. This kind of research typically uses ideation/divergent thinking tasks as a measure of creativity (more specifically, ‘creative potential’) and, since it rarely looks at what people actually do, it contributes to the classical separation between *inspiration* and *perspiration* (for a more distributed understanding of inspiration, see Glăveanu, 2022).

But what is actually the role of perspiration or hard work for creative achievement? On the one hand, studies of accomplished creators in different domains repeatedly suggested that one needs at least ten years of preparation before making a big contribution to the chosen field (Gardner, 1994). On the other hand, the constant accumulation of knowledge or skills, through repetition, is often questioned (see also the chapter on Memory). Can ‘too much knowledge’ or ‘too much exercise’ lead, on the contrary, to reduced creativity? Both camps in this debate bring their own arguments but the question, formulated as such, is misleading. It is not a matter of how much knowledge one has, but how readily accessible and flexibly organised that knowledge is (see Weisberg, 1999). Equally, it is not any form of repetition that is useful in building creative skills, but engaging in what Ericsson (2006) calls ‘deliberate practice’, which involves effortful activities designed to increase performance. What both these examples show is that high-level creativity requires expertise and this takes time, as well as a great deal of... perspiration. And yet, surprisingly, when we think about great achievements such as Darwin’s evolutionary theory or Edison’s inventions related to electric light, we are more likely to ask ‘How did they get the big idea?’, rather than ‘How long did it take them to know their field?’, or ‘How many years did they use to write up and promote their ideas?’.

This, I argue here, is the result of an inclination towards understanding creativity in terms of *insight* rather than *mastery*. Both lay people and psychologists interested in creative phenomena, and even creators themselves, are generally keen to identify the ‘moment’ when creativity happens – the stage of ‘illumination’ in Wallas’s famous

typology (see Wallas, 1926). It is no surprise, therefore, that very often creativity is metaphorically associated with a lit light bulb. However, without denying the role of insight, I consider such an approach reductionist at best, misleading at worst. What it does is actively obscure the stages of ‘perspiration’ that not only accompany but trigger creative thoughts. Learning, writing-up, checking and reformulating one’s ideas are not second-hand activities but essential parts of creating, and this applies equally to celebrated and mundane creations (see also the chapter on Business as Usual). Creativity as mastery is the contrasting paradigm that doesn’t oppose but, in fact, integrates and expands our understanding of creative ideation. If the light bulb is the emblematic symbol of the first, ‘romantic’ view of creativity, craftwork can be the emblem of the latter. What does it mean though, theoretically and practically, to consider creativity a form of craft?

From creativity in craft to creativity as craft

Crafts involve skilful work, using one’s own hands as well as a wide range of materials, tools and techniques, leading to the creation of new things. The outcomes of craft are diverse and there is often no clear boundary between arts, craft, and design. Indeed, all three of them are human activities fundamentally based on explorations of the possible in material, social, and psychological terms (Crilly, 2022; Ormerod, 2023). Examples of craft include weaving, embroidery, wood carving, rug making and ceramic work, among others. Although many of these are practised around the globe, there is always a cultural as well as individual mark in both the making process and the outcomes of craft.

Figure 4.1 Easter eggs decorated by Larisa Ujică, Ciocănești, Romania *Source:* Photo taken by the author.

Take as an example the craft of decorating eggs in northern Romania. Figure 4.1 depicts some of the products of this activity, made with the help of the traditional technique, using warm wax and drawing motifs on the shell of the egg at different stages, before immersing in colour. While on the surface very similar, employing an established range of colours, patterns, and motifs (see Gorovei, 2001), each egg is unique in the combination of these elements and the more or less visible changes or additions made in the process of drawing (see Glăveanu, 2012; see also the chapter on Translation). Moreover, there are features of decoration that individualise this work and ‘locate’ it within a broader community context – in this case, the village of Ciocănești where black as a background colour is considered traditional.

There are a few distinguishable characteristics of crafts that contribute to the creativity of their outcomes. First, they often require *manual labour* and draw on a *flexible set of skills and habits* (Ross & Glăveanu, 2023). This is due to the fact that the conditions of work are always changing and the craftsman is often required to improvise in order to overcome practical challenges (see also the chapter on Stumbling). For example, eggs are not all the same size and shape; they are fragile objects and are difficult to draw on. In quilt-making, appliquéd quilts require a careful selection and organisation of pieces in the creation of a general pattern, a process that involves multiple decisions and needs to consider, at each step, material constraints (Cooper & Allen, 1999).

Second, the products of craft belong to a recognisable set of outcomes while bearing the mark of individual and regional styles, something that makes each of them *unique*, even when the intention of the craftsman is to duplicate. Many are meant to serve practical and symbolic functions, and they often reflect a particular kind of aesthetics. For instance, the

south Indian *kōlam* is a beautiful and intricate design, never really the same, rendered usually in rice flour on the threshold or the floor of houses and temples, and having a protective function (Mall, 2007). Despite the ephemerality of many craft products, they nevertheless endure as a material practice. And it is in this close relation to *materiality* that craft activities gain a distinctive note. Artisans engage in a dialogue with the objects they produce and often describe their work as being done by the object itself, guiding its own making (see also the chapters on Affordance, Body, and Things).

Finally, developing expertise is impossible outside a social context, and craft activities are acquired and practised in interaction with others. Learning in craft takes the form of *apprenticeships*, guided forms of participation in community settings (Rogoff, 1995). Learning is here an ongoing process and it is undertaken through both observation, and trial and error. Moreover, the products of craft are not only made possible by social relations and exchanges, but are also meant equally to maintain and reflect them. Quilts in New Mexico, for example, are created in family contexts and made for immediate family, close friends or dreamed-of partners (Cooper & Allen, 1999, p. 17). Decorated eggs are kept by the family and placed on the table during meals at Easter. The making and use of craft is inseparable from *tradition* and it is this accumulation of expertise at the level of groups and across generations that makes crafts, simultaneously, continuous with the past and different from it. Take the example of Japanese *ukiyo-e* ('pictures of the floating world'), a genre of woodblock prints and paintings very popular in the 17th and 19th centuries (Kozbelt & Durmysheva, 2007). This traditional craft builds on ancient Buddhist conceptions and, in turn, has inspired important European artists such as Degas, Manet and Whistler. The vitality of this craft, as with many others, rests in its capacity both to 'keep' and to 'change' in the constant creation of a neo-tradition (see also the chapter on Rhythm).

Manual labour, skills, practice, material tools, apprenticeships, and tradition – all these characteristics of craft can easily be applied to creative action in a variety of domains. The creativity of everyday life certainly reflects all these, and many of its processes and outcomes could actually fall within an extended definition of 'craft' (e.g., interior design, cooking, gardening, and so on). What about the arts and sciences? Metaphorically, one speaks about *craftsmanship* when referring to mastering a certain domain and knowing the tricks of the trade. But is this only a metaphor?

What I am arguing here is that we certainly have at least an element of craft in most, if not all, other areas of creative production. And it is precisely this element that contributes to them actually being considered 'creative'. This is because, outside the specific knowledge and abilities required by high-level performance in art, science and technology, the medical field, and so on, the embodied, material, patterned and yet flexible ways of 'doing' things – craftsmanship – offers the real ground for a masterful performance. Creativity as mastery involves constantly perfecting one's craft.

What about routines and mindless repetition?

Our image of crafts and craftsmen is, of course, the product of centuries of reflection on the difference between knowledge, truth and authenticity, on the one hand, and technique, skill and manual work, on the other. The big divide between art and craft is an example of this. Collingwood (1938) believed the latter is the outcome of 'preconceived' ideas and that 'the craftsman knows what he wants to make before he makes it' (pp. 15–16). This accusation is not the only one of its kind. Craft is, for most, not synonymous with creativity

but, if anything, the opposite of it: the realm of routines and mindless repetition. While this is certainly not an opinion shared by craftsmen themselves, it is not surprising to find many of them reluctant to take on the identity of ‘creator’ (Glăveanu & Tanggaard, 2014). The *ukiyo-e* artists, focused on by Kozbelt and Durmysheva (2007), don’t even mention originality or departures from tradition. In my own research with Easter egg decorators, there was a need to find the balance between continuing a tradition and adding or contributing to it. And yet, craftsmen are aware that their work leads to unique products, admired by those around them. But if novelty happens, they rarely take credit for it directly: it is accidents, or the material taking over and imposing its own rules; for women drawing ornaments in rice, ‘credit for innovation lies as much with the generative capacity of the *kōlam* (...) as with the creativity (...) of the practitioner’ (Mall, 2007, p. 75).

The misconception of craft as the antithesis of creativity steams from a certain understanding of the relation between idea generation and idea implementation that prioritises the former over the latter. The old fallacy of believing that ‘the sculpture is already waiting in the marble’ makes researchers and lay people alike focus on having creative ideas (the sculpture), rather than working (the marble). What craftwork demonstrates is that there is no strict separation between the two. It is in and through making that insights emerge, are detected, fail, or lead to new developments. The craft of making things is not mechanical – if anything, because it always involves a certain amount of risk (see the notion of ‘workmanship of risk’ in Pye, 1968; see also the chapter on Fear). The spontaneity of being inspired and building an artistic or scientific ‘vision’ cannot be disconnected from practice, from material tools and their resistance to our visions, from the role our bodies play in generating any kind of novelty. In the end, creation is not the result of a disembodied, cerebral entity but becomes manifest precisely in practical action, in the development and application of *techne*, in craft itself.

Additionally, a pervasive misconception regarding the role and meaning of tradition contributes further to marginalising crafts. It is certainly true that repetition and stability are encouraged in a variety of folk activities but the tradition being ‘kept’ is neither static nor monolithic. Traditions change in order to continue and this is nowhere more obvious than in the work of craftsmen. Furthermore, all other forms of creative expression are ultimately rooted in tradition, whether we call it knowledge, conventions, norms, or the existing canon. Arts have their own traditions; science, as well. As Feldman noted, ‘creative thought (...) is, by definition, part of a cultural tradition – even when it breaks with tradition’ (Feldman, 1974, p. 68). Breaks with tradition are rare but not uncommon, even in craft. What we often fail to notice, though, is that such ‘revolutions’ are carried by and lead to the institutionalisation of their own ‘traditions’.

From creative thinking to creative making

What I have been advocating here is a way of relocating creativity from a paradigm focused on thinking, insight and revolutionary outcomes to one grounded in learning, traditions, mastery, and craftsmanship. Despite presenting them almost as opposites, these views are not incompatible, just as creative thinking is not the opposite of creative making. The latter integrates the former. However, instead of the fascination with one ‘big’ moment of insight, we are left with evolving and cumulative insights, with the gradual transformation of people and things (see also the chapter on Pathways), working within a frame set by material constraints. In this sense, I am using the overall metaphor of creativity as craft as

a more comprehensive way of understanding creative phenomena. The consequences of separating thinking from making, idea generation from implementation, ideas from body, and creating hierarchies between them is counterproductive. This is how, for instance, we have now two relatively separate literatures, one on creativity ('getting the idea'), the other on innovation ('creating a change in the world based on this idea'). An integrative approach is long overdue.

Isn't this a rather romantic vision of crafts and of craftsmen? Aren't they limited by a need to preserve rather than create? Opposed to change? Working to sell their products and make a living? In some cases, yes, but I am not making a one-to-one parallel between craft and creativity here. I am simply noticing deep similarities and highlighting the theoretical and practical significance of relating the two. For Richard Sennett, 'craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake' (Sennett, 2008, p. 9). For a long time, we had the scientist (or inventor) and the artist as the two main paradigmatic representations of creative people. And yet, creativity goes well beyond scientific or artistic work. There is room for 'thirdness' and, in particular, for a focus on forms on everyday life creativity, the kind of creative expression that combines the analytical side of science and the expressive side of art with the constraints and possibilities of daily action and interaction (for a discussion of science, art and craft as creativity paradigms see Glăveanu, 2017). Crafting is a component of all human activities and, potentially, one that expands into the non-human world (Harris, 2023). Nowadays, a lot of crafting takes place in digital spaces (see also the chapter on Digital), including through the construction and circulation of memes and other creative online content (Glăveanu & de Saint Laurent, 2021). While the move from Easter eggs to memes might seem surprising, there are many key features that bring the two examples together, including references to larger traditions (from decoration patterns to meme templates), learning through apprenticeships (in physical workshops or online forums), and the reliance on embodied work (less visible but certainly present in the generation of online content).

A deeper reflection on the complex relationship between craft and creativity raises a number of new questions. Would internauts easily identify as craftspeople? Can a focus on craft create a natural bridge between various other domains of creativity? Does the study of craft shed new light on the evolutionary (species based) and developmental (lifecourse based) origins of our creativity? Is this a more inclusive and participatory way of co-creating? What does it mean to focus on craft and craftsmanship in the context of a rapid rise in artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-powered creative work? Last but not least, can those who produce craftwork be our new prototype of the creative person and, if so, how would this change the way we understand ourselves, others, machines, society, and nature?

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