

Abstract

This thesis is an interview-based study that will broach the topic of meaning in work by looking at how meaning is created amongst Swedish artisans; a group of labourers defined by their uniqueness in contemporary labour-norms. The focus of this study is the theorisation of two processes which create meaning within artisan labour: one based on reflexive engagement with production, and one based on collective creations of meaning through outside structurers. From these two processes, a third, unified view on the creation of meaning is proposed, where reflexive engagement and collective creation coalesce to create meaning in labour. Taken together, these three processes come to represent how meaning is formed in artisan labour, and could, in turn, become starting points for further discussions on the nature of meaning in work.

Keywords: Artisan, Meaning of work, Labour, Identity, Social Anthropology

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1 THE WORKDAY STARTS

There are few things humans have to do in life as universal as work. From Borneo to Boston, human beings, every day, leave the comforts of their home to do *something*. In that, work comes to occupy many meanings in everyday life. For some, work is “work”; it is an unwilling necessity that needs to be done in order to not starve. Yet, for others, work acts as a source of fulfilment; strenuous at times, but ultimately the *raison d’être*, the very reason for being, in their lives. Why some people find work engaging, and why others find it utterly meaningless, seemingly becomes a question of why people work.

Meaning is, however, also a complicated term. For some, the term describes human beings search for purpose; the reason one does what one does (Kierkegaard, 2000; Frankl, 1985). However, equally, meaning could also be viewed as the force that enables humans to make sense of the world around them (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Meaning could even be the product of humans interacting with the material world, giving reason to the physical world’s existence (Heidegger, 2010). The term thus comes to occupy many meanings but is united in two aspects: it implies a positive experience (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010), and exists as a subjective experience of the world (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). In other words, meaning is important for humans, and exists as a phenomenon only understandable from the individual experiences of humans.

Meaning in work then becomes a matter of understanding the qualitative aspects of its creation. Meaning in work is, however, not a state of nature: it does not exist by itself, and instead needs to be understood from a combination of social and material relations. Understanding how meaning in work is created then becomes a matter of understanding the process of its creation, and in that, it becomes paramount to understand what work is. For work exists as a coalescence of systems, material forces and social actors (Karlsson, 1986), and in this existence, is created from the people existing within its framework. To this end, this thesis will be a delve into the personal stories of labour, focusing in on the unique aspects meaning and work can take in the labour of humans, in order to understand how meaning is created within work.

Understanding how meaning is created in work then becomes a matter of finding personal stories of labour, stories where meaning seemingly becomes the main goal of their work. Put differently, these labour stories need to be from occupations who have a unique relationship to the pursuit of meaning. They need to be labourers who experience a total engagement with their work, where the main process of work seemingly gives meaning in engagement, a reason for

being in itself. The potential objects of study also need to, within their work, interact with broader understandings of what meaning *could* be; beyond meaning just being a product of their own, reflexive interactions. Through this dual engagement with the creation of meaning, a potential study of labour can begin to explore the creation of meaning from multiple angles without sacrificing narrative focus, keeping a centration on one subject's stories whilst simultaneously seeing the plurality possible within work.

In other words, the objects of this study need to be passionate, driven; fanatical even. They need to be masters of their art, with full control of their labour, and what meaning that might be produced needs to become a product of their own creation, or at least a product of their own relations. In this search, what was found was an oddity in modern production, one which highlights the deeply personal aspects of labour whilst simultaneously showcasing the interactions of systems and material. What was found could be described as archaic work, traditional work: work, that in some ways, serving as an antithesis to modern day production. What this text will focus in on is artisan work.

Why artisan? For sat within messy workshops, surrounded by tools of every size and complexity, in places of business with centuries of legacy behind them, artisans ply a way of work deeply connected with meaning. Traditionally, artisans have been seen as the antithesis to alienated labour within capitalism (Ruskins, 1851; Marx, 1970), and whilst this charitable view is changing within modern research (Yarrow & Jones, 2014; Cant, 2020), artisans still occupy a form of labour uniquely defined by themselves (Carrier, 2020). For these reasons, artisans and artisans labour become interesting subjects to study and learn from in regards to the creation of meaning within work.

But how does one approach the study of artisans and their labour? To understand artisans and their labour and begin to understand how meaning is created in their work, the first aim of any discussion on the matter must be to understand how artisan labour is created in a reflexive manner. In other words, is meaning in artisan labour a question of its entanglement with material and person? Is meaning in one's labour a product of self? From understanding this context of artisan labour, one can then ask the question what relation the social and collective aspects of artisan labour have for the production of meaning. Put differently, are the social relations navigated by artisans a fundamental force in both the labour's structure and its contextualisation of meaning? Is meaning in one's labour, perhaps, a product of the collective? Is the creation of meaning within artisan labour perhaps a combination of the two?

From artisan's own stories and interactions, this thesis will attempt to answer, through an interview-based, qualitative study of artisans active in Sweden, one main question: How is meaning created in artisan labour? To answer this question, this thesis will break down this question into two parts: one concerning a reflexive production of meaning created in work itself, and one concerning a collective production of meaning. From answering these two sub-questions, this thesis will then explore the possibilities of adjoining both answers in order to come to an understand of just how meaning is made in artisan labour.

Summarized, this thesis questions are:

How is meaning created in artisan labour?

- 1. How is meaning in artisan labour created reflexively?**
- 2. How is meaning in artisan labour created collectively?**

The content of this thesis will be divided as follows: In **Chapter 2**, a preliminary definition of artisan labour will be presented, laying the groundwork for what exactly is meant with the term "artisan labour". From that, in **Chapter 3**, previous research on artisan labour will be presented, with a focus on key research within both labour research and on artisans themselves. **Chapter 4** will present the theoretical framework used within this thesis, with a focus on two differing views on the creation of meaning within work: one subjective, and one collective. **Chapter 5** will present the methodological theory used in the data collection and analysis, with a focus on critical realist methods, as well as the ethical considerations of thesis. From that, **Chapter 6** will focus in on the reflexive creation of meaning, **Chapter 7** the collective creation of meaning, with **Chapter 8** proposing a synthesis between these two views. Finally, **Chapter 9** will discuss concluding remarks and recommendations for future avenues of research.

2 ARTISANS: DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXT

In this section, a discussion on the definition of artisan labour will be had. This will start by presenting different ways one can look at the process of artisan labour. From that, a brief history of artisan labour in Sweden will be presented.

DEFINING ARTISAN LABOUR

How does one define artisan labour? In some ways, defining artisan labour begins by placing said labour as an outlier within general labour norms. This position, of artisan labour as an outlier to industrial production, has been quite prominent within both labour research and in general sentiment. From John Ruskins *The Stones of Venice* (1851), rallying against the division of man and labour in the general workforce (compared to artisan labour), to Marx (1970), writing of artisan labour as the only fulfilled worker in capitalist production, the Western world, both within academia and in popular culture, has had a long fascination with artisan labour.

According to the classical definition of artisan labour, its existence is defined by its ownerships of the means of production and of its labour capital, the result of which is an inalienability of work (Marx, 1970, 1983). To expand on this thought, apart from owning their means of production, Carrier (2020) writes of the inalienability of artisan works thanks to their control of time; that is time needed for, and demanded in, production. By being able to control the time it takes for something to be produced and the general schedule of a day, artisans are able control their work and create a naturalized exchange with labour. In effect, artisans avoid alienability, understood in this context as the separation of human's social identity from themselves, and others, by a lack of control in product (Seeman, 1959; Marx, 2007). Artisans then avoid alienability through mastery of both production *and* time.

Artisan labour is also sometimes defined by its internal hierarchies, and this is usually exemplified within the Master/Apprentice division (Hellgren, 2010). This division is primarily one of skill: the apprentice is “taken under the wing” of a Master that relays all the skills of a trade in return for a continuation of the trade. What separates this from skill learning in other places of work is both the time demanded of this dynamic (usually taking many years), and its embodied way of learning; with the many techniques and mysteries of a trade only being able to be thought through hands-on learning environments.

To go further, Karlsson (1986:89-90) explains artisan labour by its enveloping nature. For artisans, their work is inescapable to their being: it is a very real, and crucially foundational part

of what makes up their identities. This contrasts with to what Carrier (2020) calls the division in modern capitalism between two forms of social life: one where people and things are interconnected and inseparable; and one where they are not. As capitalist society separates work from “life”, moving from personalised, family-oriented modes of production to Fordian factory lines, production is, in effect, separating people from things, creating a divided state of being. For artisans this division is not as noticeable as for regular workers, as their work becomes an active, living part of their life and not a separate sphere of existence “needing to be done”. Seemingly, artisan work becomes just as much a question of ownership in the social sense as an ownership in the material sense.

However, this view, of artisan work as inalienable and fully in control, is not entirely beholden to the stories artisans tell about themselves. In this, there exists a few crucial counterarguments to the narrative of artisan workers being free from an alienated world. Firstly, one needs to approach artisan labour from a practical perspective: products need to leave the workshop. Here, the concepts of attachment and detachment become prudent to understand. Cant (2020) writes of this production necessity within artisan labour, and that one should not look at artisan work as a binary between alien and non-alien labour. Instead, different degrees of alienability and inalienability that co-exist with one another must be understood. In this, the production of things outside the will of artisans comes to represent a form of alienation, a source of annoyance and tedium for the artisans even in their ownership of the material aspects of their labour. Furthermore, these degrees of alienation could also be the result of local, workshop-based power structures.

Moreover, although Yarrow and Jones (2014) approaches artisan labour as an ontologically engaged orientation to the world that creates and shapes both man and material through extraordinary circumstances, they also caution against situating their labour as wholeheartedly opposed to traditional forms of labour. Just as the artisan worker is afforded the power to personalise production, the artisan has to remove themselves, both intellectually and emotionally, from the process of production in order to *produce*. For in the end, there exists a relation to outside actors, namely customers, that must be negotiated. In this dialectic between producer and consumer, artisan do not have complete control over what is to be produced. In the same vein, artisan labour is also inescapably tied to historical and geographic frameworks (Gibson, 2016). Without tools and skills passed down, without locals and tastes centred, without physical place and memory; artisan labour struggles to exist, at least as a unique form of labour.

To summarize, artisan labour, in general, is a mode of production filled with contradictions. Yet that is precisely what defines it. Artisan labour is defined by its ownership of the modes of its production but is also equally defined by its constant negotiation to customers in its application. Artisan labour is defined by its social envelopment, but not in an inherently “positive” manner: it could equally be negatively controlling and conforming. Above all artisan labour is in constant negotiation with itself, and it is from that renegotiation this thesis will be approaching the topic of artisan labour.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ARTISAN WORK IN SWEDEN

Before the topic of artisan labour can be discussed in earnest, it would be prudent to first present a brief general history of artisan work in Sweden. The reason for this is twofold: it both offers an opportunity to familiarise oneself with the historical narratives behind artisan labour, as well as giving this thesis a staging ground for approaching this works interlocutors. The history of artisan production in Sweden is a history of the social effects of capitalist expansion (Schön, 1979), and mirrors general trends within the majority of western economies. This is because artisan labour represents a historical continuation of the medieval guild-economies in Europe, a mode of production at odds with capitalism. Guild labour could be summarized in three concepts, both in Sweden (Hellgren, 2010) and in Europe in general (Marx, 2007): worker enskillment, competition limitation and collective organisation (Hobsbawm, 1984).

Worker enskillment concerns the way skill and skill acquisition functioned in artisan organisations: where skill both functioned as a means of economic advancement, as well as means of economic independence from outside agents (Hobsbawm, 1984). The “skilling” of workers therefor became one of the hallmarks of guild operations. As for competition limitation, artisan organisation within guilds became a way of limiting the amount of competition between workers by regulating the amount of them, either through rigid internal hierarchies (Karlsson, 1986:78) or economic exclusivity (Hellgren, 2010). The effect of this became a cartel creation centred around economic gains for their own members, forcing out competing actors from the market. Finally, guild-organisations during the medieval and early-modern period also acted as collective organisations, functioning as important community support pillars for its members. As an example, pension, funeral and sick-funds were organised through the guilds (Hellgren, 2010), creating an important social function for its members. Taken together, these concepts created a highly skilled, highly collectivised, economically independent segment of the workforce that controlled a large percentage of production.

With the changing of productive systems from feudalism to early capitalism however, this group of workers came to be deprioritised in favour of cheaper and more scalable production, the by-product of workers moving into cities from the countryside (Hobsbawm, 1984). In effect, more workers existed in a smaller space, and the exclusivity afforded to guilds dwindled as a result.

Whilst street names still carried the legacy of artisan production, the social importance of their namesakes slowly eroded. The triumph of free-market capitalism in Sweden came in 1846 when the Swedish government abolished enforced guild-participation [SE: *Skråtvånget*] within the Swedish economy (Hellgren, 2010), opening up previous exclusive economic activity to a range of other actors¹. Two important reactions came to be because of this. The first happened already in 1845, with the formation of the Swedish Craft Association [SE: *Svenska Slöjdföreningen*] as an attempt to “save” and promote Swedish handcraft knowledge and tradition (Mark, 1991). This initiative could be seen as the beginning of the generalized view in Sweden that artisan labour has intrinsic cultural and historical value in itself (Mark, 1991). The second reaction came from the various profession’s masters and artisans, who collectively founded artisan associations around Sweden in order to situate themselves in this new economic environment (Hellgren, 2010). The result of this was artisan work finding new niches within capitalist production as, ostensibly, highly skilled small businessmen. However, simultaneously, these new artisan associations also maintained the collective legacy of guild production. Both organisations are active to this day and serve as important economic and social structures for artisans.

In general, however, whilst the historical traces of guild-production could still be seen in streets called “cobblers street” or “ironmonger road”, artisan labour has become more in line with regular, modern-day modes of ownership. Guild-participation remain high for many workshops, but many more have left the organized aspect of their labour behind them. In this expansion, artisan workshops operate in varied locals, with some hugging well-trodden tourist streets, and others choosing to isolate themselves in far-off tinkering temples. Some workshops are bustling with industry, others facing hardships after the COVID-19 pandemic. Put simply, there exists a breadth in realities for artisan labour today in Sweden. Inescapably, however, there exists striking similarities and uniqueness’s between artisans even today. The new realities of small business have created a different kind of solidarity between artisan workshops, but this solidarity still exists in tandem with the traditional “laboured” aspect of artisan tradition. Customer groups might have expanded, even been made global, but customer relations are still done face to face. Finally, the craft itself still remains in the labour that is done in artisan workshop. They have not

¹ Full freedom of economic activity was established in 1864 by the passing of the *Näringsfrihetsförordningen*

become glorified storefronts living off none-discerning customers, but active places of production still in entanglement with the thing they make. It is from that perspective the story of this thesis grounds itself.

3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In segment, a short discussion will be had about previous research concerning artisan labour. The first segment concerns some key previous research on labour and its role in the creation of identity, with the second segment presenting more specific research on the nature of artisan labour.

Labour studies

Regarding previous studies of labour, at least in so far as the topics this paper will deal with, there exists a few key previous areas of research that one needs to be aware of. Concerning the topic of what labour is, Jan Karlssons (1986) monograph on the topic of work, *Begreppet Arbete*, offers a comprehensive dissection of the concept. Karlssons (1986) understanding of work is founded in the idea that work is more than just “activities that produce economic value”. Instead, the process of doing, of changing the natural world, should be seen as the foundation for what it means to be human: with work being “doing” done out of necessity, not out of want (Karlsson, 1986:51). From that, work should be viewed as a product of pre-existing social relations *and* of its own production, being done for its own reason *and* for collective reasons. It exists both in quantifiable terms, as structures and forms measurable over many instances, and in qualitative expressions, taking its unique expression in different types of work. To break down the meaning of work and labour, one must then break down both its quantifiable and unique forms.

Why work is done then also becomes a central question to explore. Harris (2020) approaches this topic through the lens of the Andean peasants she studied during her fieldwork. Here, work for the Andean peasants is a central part of personhood, inseparable from what it means to be human. It becomes a good in itself, focusing in on the act itself and not the product of it. Yet, it cannot be explained away through a separation of work from the wider culture of the Andes, but through the interconnectedness of all the regions political, cultural and kinship structures. The cultural aspects of production also become crucial for Najis (2020) study of Moroccan carpet weavers and French organic farmers, where the context of how production is framed changes depending on cultural norms of production: or in other words, labour done out of necessity is

seen as “toil”, whilst labour done willingly is seen as a higher form of labour. Gowlland (2020:207) also writes about the relationship between “cultural ideas” and engaging with labour, but focuses in on Taiwan where cultural ideals become strong motivational factors for initial knowledge acquisition in work and life-long learning, with knowledge and skill-acquisition in work serving as an end in itself instead as a means to an end. In other words, the why of work is also the *how* of work.

Furthering a deep-dive into the why of work, the question becomes what meaning there is to be had in work. For Donati (2002), this everchanging landscape of what exactly constitutes meaning in work becomes one of the great challenges of modernity. This change in meaning is seen in research done by Ros, Schwartz and Surkiss (1999), research which points to a dynamic nature of values. Values, in this study the values of teachers, serve as a foundation for meaning in work, but shift and change over the course of a working life when faced with the practicalities of work. Lofty, idealistic dreams morph into practical, solution-oriented goals after years of interacting with bureaucracy, students, and parents. Crucially, however, values still remain values: they remain a foundation for finding worth in work. Values then, in a general sense, become crucial in order to understanding meaning in work. This focus on values could also be found within Dawn Rivers (2023) study into the economic value of values for small business firms in the US. One of the key takeaways from this study is the notion of sufficiency, the practise of “just enough”, creating both economic and social value for their owners. The values of business owners, in other words, create the potential value a business can generate.

Artisan Specifics

Onto the specifics of artisan research, one prevailing area of research is how history and locality affect artisan production. Gibson (2016) writes about the importance of locality, “authenticity” and historicity within the cowboy bootmakers of El Paso, Texas. What becomes crucial for their operation is partly the history of boot-making, and the cowboy aesthetic, in El Paso. Without El Paso, without history actively affecting the present, the bootmakers could not manifest their wares: both in a kinetic sense (skills passed on), but equally in a social sense (authenticity of “boots” passed on). Delving deeper, Sian Jones and Thomas Yarrow (2013) argue that authenticity is not a subjective construct, or inert property of things, but a property that emerges through a dialectic of person and material.

This view of the dialectic between person and material seems to be prevalent among artisan researchers. Aruna Ranganathan (2018) writes about the ability of artisan production in connecting producer with product. This attachment to product leaves artisans to seek out more

discerning customers in order to facilitate smoother transitions of knowledge and skill, often to the economic detriment for the artisans. However, this product relationship also leads to higher degrees of work-satisfaction for artisans.

In essence, what becomes clear from the previous research is the idea that labour could be a central structure for understanding how meaning is created, both in a cultural, yet inescapably individual, sense; with artisan labour serving as both the means to explain, and critic, this relationship. What is lacking in previous research in the field is, however, an engagement with the concept of meaning as a product of artisan production. Whilst many certainly discuss the idea, few, if any, dedicate their sole focus on its creation. It is from this niche this thesis will delve deeper in.

4 THEORY

To understand the different conceptual ways to approach the topic of meaning within labour, this following section will be broken down in two distinct views on the matter: one where value is a reflexive process, and one where value is a product of collective endeavours.

MEANING AS REFLEXIVE

To break down a proposed reflexive view on the nature of meaning in labour, this segment will first cover two key concepts of Foucault: Subjectification and Practices of Self. Subjectification, in its simplest explanation, concerns the internalization of societal norms and structures: making them an integral part of ones being (Faubion & Rabinow, 2000:459). It is, in effect, the way people make themselves subjects: the way the self creates a relation to itself. This is not, however, an innate view of the self, where subjectivity is a fixed being, shackled by societal norms. No, subjectivity should instead be seen as a dynamic state of being, always becoming, creating what we are, yet never fixed (McGushin, 2010:135). Yet, people are not free, at least entirely free, to choose what norms and structures to subjugate themselves to. According to a Foucaultian perspective, whilst humans are constituting ourselves, humans are, at the same time, being constituted by institutions. This contradiction is summarized by Taylor (2010:173)

Put differently, subjectivity is not distinct from but is rather formed in and through relations of power. There are not emancipatory institutions and norms that enable us, on the one hand, and oppressive or normalizing institutions and norms that constrain us, on the other; rather, we are simultaneously enabled and constrained by the same institutions and norms.

Put simply: humans are formed by, shape, and act despite, social constraints; creating a continuous dialectic between the two (Faubion & Rabinow, 2000:462).

How this internalization is achieved is through a process which Foucault calls “technologies of self” or “practices of self” (Foucault, 1988:18; McGushin, 2010:128), which requires a person to “act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself” (Foucault, 1990:28). The creation of an object, an ideal, to reference oneself to therefore becomes critical in order to self-reflect. This objectification is “the process of externalization through which something or someone is made concrete” (Skinner, 2012:909), or in other words the process of producing “objective” types (i.e., good or bad people) through subjective experience. Practices of self are therefore the ways people critically reflect upon themselves, creating the possibility for the subjective dialectic, by way of transforming subjective experience into “objective” states of being, creating the possibility for said self-reflection.

Meaning in work then becomes a process of creating meaning reflexively, creating purpose through a subjectification of social understandings of what is “purposeful”. Meaning then comes from an interaction of self, where the worker in question internalizes social and material conditionings that then transform into meaning through personal action. In other words, meaning becomes a process of self-creation and self-discovery, the boundaries of which are created by the worker themselves.

Practical Aspects of Reflexive Meaning

This process of self-creation and self-discovery could further be seen by moving past the general Foucauldian view and into the practical aspects of labour. Tim Ingold (2001) writes about material engagement, which is the concept that knowledge (or rather all labour done through kinetic practices) is learned through repeated tacit knowledge produced by practice and repetition (as opposed to mental comprehension). In a sense, one cannot separate what an artisan does from what they produce and use (Cant, 2020). A labourer’s relation to material, their material entanglement and transformation, could also be summarized in one word: skill. But what is skill, and what is the product of skill?

Skill is, in a sense, the way humans interact with their work (Karlsson, 1986). According to Prentice (2012:409), skill could be seen as a self-making project rather than a set of technical capacities. Skill becomes a process of acquiring agency, and on a grander scale, a way of regaining some measure of control within capitalist production. To go further, McLoughlin (2019) writes in her text about Irish slaughterhouse workers about the importance of control and skill for the

workers in navigating the harsh working conditions of the abattoir. Here, mastering of the techniques of slaughter, and controlling both animals themselves and the way production is done, become important for creating feelings of self-worth within the workers. Workers who fail to retreat into skill are not able to remove themselves from the act of killing a living being. Skill-gaining is, however, not just a process of rational logic, but could also be a process of pleasure and self-discovery. Prentice (2012), for example, writes about how Trinidadian garment workers not only learn to sew on their own time for economic reasons, but also for self-making.

This dialectic between person and product that is skill could be seen in its absolute state, that of the concept of *flow*. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) writes of the state of *flow* as a state where all actors within it are completely occupied by their labour and could both exert their skills without conscious intervention whilst receive emotional catharsis upon the task's completion. This reflexive relationship between person and material, exemplified in the state of flow as a product of skill, creates a reflexive state of meaning: as both catharsis and identities become products of internalizing dialectics. Skill becomes the example of when systems of self, society and materiality come into coalescence to enable reflexive meaning. To further expand on this thought, Makovicky (2020:315) posits that:

Artisans experienced craft work as both submission and mastery, approaching the material world alternately as inanimate, subject to the will of human agents and reflecting their labour, but also as animate and dangerously seductive.

Finally, there exists a dialectic between the thing and person in this creation, affecting both personhood and material: creating a sense of meaning through a process of self-interacting. Material engagement therefore goes longer than just learning: it becomes a question of personhood. In the same vein, Naji (2020) posits that this processual and embodied dimension of labour, the very physical interaction with the natural world that is craft, also transforms artisans morally through a transformation of material. This creation of morals then in turn affects social and material norms.

MEANING AS COLLECTIVE

Another way of approaching the question of how meaning is created within labour is to view it through the lens of value as a collective endeavour, and concerning this collective creation in labour, it becomes almost impossible not to mention Marx. For Marx (1983,1984; Kalb, 2022), value is the product of human beings' interaction with the natural world. Specifically, value is created from the quantity of human labour exerted upon the natural world, either through the amount of labour *embodied* in the process of production (i.e., the amount of total labour-power

exerted in all of history); or from the amount of labour *exerted* in the process of its production. One can think of it as labour done now, or all the labour done leading up to this point. Value can, however, take many forms. It can either take the form of direct value for a human (use-value), or an abstracted value, exchanged for other forms of value in the form of a commodity (exchange value). Value exists then in both a semiotic way and in a tangible way, yet crucially is manifested in both ways through the process of meaning. For if nothing is meaningful, if there exists no force driving value production, then no value is created: as nothing can be created without the active agent *willing it into being*. Meaning, derived from the interaction of labour and material forces, becomes crucial to enable, give purpose, to the moment of creation.

To go further, one critical aspect of value for Marx in the production of value is this: production is both the creation of material goods *and* social relations (Turner, 2008:44). Value is social, and insofar this is true: value is inherently comparative (Turner, 2008:45; Graber, 2013:225) and just as much a product of mutual creation as singular expression (Ranganathan, 2017; Souleles et al., 2023:164). What could be seen as creating value therefore becomes a representation of a given places values, as the social compositions of a given places production systems exist *because* it enables production. In other words, the production of value also represents the production of values, or as Graber (2001:45) puts it, *'the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves, as reflected in on or another socially recognized form'*. What value is created then comes to create the very cosmologies humans understand:

I think we have to place ourselves back in that original tradition: one that understands human beings as projects of mutual creation, value as the way such projects become meaningful to the actors, and the world we inhabit as emerging from those projects rather than the other way around. (Graeber, 2013:238)

Value creation then becomes a matter of collective engagement. To exemplify this, this segment returns to Makovickys (2020:317) lace-makers, where she writes of the unspoken ideal within lacemakers in Slovakia; where 'craft had its greatest merit not simply when it was undertaken for its own sake, but when it took the form of value transformation'. To put it bluntly: artisans must also create boring stuff, stuff that is not engaging for them. Yet this boring work still creates a social value for the product and begs the question if what's given meaning in artisan labour is not the labour in itself but the societal worth of labour: in a sense, artisans labours worth to capitalism, a collective cosmology, and not its own inherent worth in itself.

Value as values could further be understood by looking at descriptions of product. Nancy Munn (1986) writes about how some material objects becomes icons of the acts that produced them, or in other words: value becomes symbols of values. Munn calls this *qualisigns*, or the value of acts

in relation to their capacity to increase the temporal, or spatial, field of action given to an individual. Put simply, qualisigns are markers, or perhaps more apply a feeling, of space and time within things. For Makovicky (2020:318-319), Slovakian lace-makers described the “density” of their lace compared to their Spanish counterparts as a marker of their relative abundance of leisure time. Here then, density both exists as a physical object (the density of the lace), as well as a marker of temporal freedom for Slovakian lace-makers. Makovicky (2020:319) further explains how material qualities like ‘flimsiness’ or ‘gauziness’ within lace both serves as physical markers of quality, and of material proof of productive time (and therefor valuably used time) within its qualisign.

Meaning in work for this relational view, then, becomes a process of collective making (Graeber, 2013). What value a process of production has only comes into being through social forces (Turner, 2008); and what meaning there is to be had then becomes a question of collective conscious (Graeber, 2013). To view this, understanding both *why* creation is done, as well as *what* creation means, becomes paramount. From that, the question of how meaning in work exists moves from an individualised, reflexive starting-point to a decentralized, collective point of view.

5 METHOD

As stated in the introduction, this thesis main mode of inquiry into the question of “how meaning is created in artisan work” is through an interview-based study with artisans themselves. In this, the interlocutors for this study came to be artisans of different trades, working in different regions of Sweden. As the goal of this thesis is understanding artisan labours creation of meaning in a broad sense, an effort was made to reach a variety of trades in a variety of environments; although all trades were, ultimately, united by similar structures in their work based on the previous definition provided in chapter 2. In total, eight interviews were done with seven interlocutors, were one of the interviews was a group interview.

The interlocutor’s interviewed for this work are (listed by profession and place of work):

- A Bespoke Shoemaker and Cobbler in Stockholm (female)
- A Rattan-Chair Maker in Stockholm (female)
- A Silversmith in Stockholm (female)
- A Furniture Maker in Skåne (male)
- A Cobbler in Skåne (male)
- 2 Furniture Restorers in Skåne (Male and Female)

To reach this variety of artisans, this thesis contacted different artisan workshops based on information provided by the websites of the Swedish Artisan Association² [SE: *Hantverkarnas Riksorganisation*] and the Association of Guild-Artisans³ [SE: *Föreningen Skråhantverkarna*]. The reason for using these websites were twofold: it significantly simplified coming into contact with potential interlocutors, and offered a premade sortition of who the artisan themselves defined as “artisan”. Every potential interlocutor was contacted independently from one another to ensure anonymity if interest was shown in participating.

The interviews for this thesis were done in the old town of Stockholm and around Skåne, and all were done physically in the respective artisan’s workshop. The reason for this was two-fold: it served the function of creating a familiar place for the interlocutors to meet up, as well as giving me an opportunity to do a limited amount of observational work to familiarize myself with the artisan process and the “feel” of the workspace. The difference in workshop locality, ranging from hugging tourist streets to laying far of the beaten track, also enabled a deeper

² <https://www.hantverkarna.se/>

³ <https://skrahantverkarna.se/>

understanding of how place functions for artisans. Furthermore, to the best of the interviewer's ability, all questions were asked in "everyday" language. The reason for this was also two-fold, as it both helped interlocutors clearly understanding what was being asked in interviews, and avoided unnecessary quagmires regarding specific terminology. This was not to say that interlocutors were not asked to reflect on specific themes like "creativity" or "meaning", but instead that these themes were discussed outside specific theoretical assumptions of their nature; instead grounding the discussion in the interlocutors own understanding of the ideas. All interviews were conducted in Swedish, but will be presented, when quoted, in English.

The primary method for data collection was done via semi-structured interviews, with interviews typically ranging between one to two hours. The length of these interviews was done for methodological reasons, owing to an active incorporation of biographical-narrative interview methods. What this means in practice is that every interview followed a standardised, general format, called within biographical research a "generalized sequence of narration" (Rosenthal, 2004:50; Bornat, 2008). This sequence was divided into two segments of the interview, with each segment taking roughly the same time.

The first sequence of narration, called "the period of main narration", began with a generalized question to the effect of "tell me everything about your work". This was done to both put the interlocutor at ease, as well as finding generalized patterns within the interlocutor's narration. Around 50% of the interview time was allocated to this question. This period of main narration was then followed by what is called a "questioning period", and this segment was further divided into two sub-divisions. First, the interlocutors were asked about topics that appeared during their previous period of main narration. After this sub-segment was finished, the interlocutors were asked about topics outside their earlier narration, usually trends found in either theory or previous interviews. A simplified version of this process is presented below:

- 1. Period of main narration**

- a. Initial narrative question (Usually to the effect of "Tell me everything about your work")

- 2. Questioning Period**

- a. Internal narrative questions (about topics discussed earlier in the initial narrative question)
 - b. External narrative questions (about topics not discussed earlier in the initial narrative question)

These two segments have the effect of creating one explorative discursive segment, and one of more focused questioning. The effect of this was that new, unexplored data came fourth during in initial narrative questioning, and could immediately be questioned/contextualised through the questioning period; with previous data being further exhumed during the external narrative questions.

INTERACTION WITH DATA

The data for this study was analysed through an analytical framework informed by critical realism (CR). In practice, this means approaching ontology not as a product of epistemology, but instead understood *through* it (Fletcher, 2017:182). In CR-methodology, reality does not exist exclusively within human discourse and knowledge but is probed and explored by said discourse and knowledge. This limited act of understanding creates an imperfect view of reality, that is nonetheless full of interaction with something *real* (Danermark et al., 2019). By understanding that phenomena existing at an empirical level are products of the causal mechanism of social products (Fletcher, 2017:183), one can understand that, for example, the artisan's discursive understandings of the world are also limited descriptions of a collective ontological reality (Crinson, 2007:35). As Graeber (2001:219) puts it:

Even if one were to make a statement as apparently innocuous as “ritual can take many forms in many places”, one is still asserting that “ritual” is a meaningful cross-cultural category, implying [...] all human beings have engaged in some kind of ritual activity at some point or another, that ritual is an inherent aspect of human society, even if there's no scholarly consensus whatsoever as to what, precisely, a ritual is.

This theoretical understanding of CR then translates to a methodological practise. This study has engaged with the data by looking for rough trends in the data that point to *tendencies*, which in turn re-describe the empirical data through theoretical concepts (Fletcher, 2017:188). These tendencies, or *demi-regularities*, are the reactions of causal mechanism with empirical phenomena (Fletcher, 2017:185), and provide a potential explanation of ontologies (in this case an ontology of labour and meaning). However, within qualitative research, these demi-regularities are not constructed in themselves from discursive acts. Instead, they are first made apparent through both inductive abstractions, the process of looking at the data itself for themes, and deductive abstractions, where previous theories are used in order to create themes (Crinson, 2007:38). A visual presentation of the process could be seen on the next page (Figure 1):

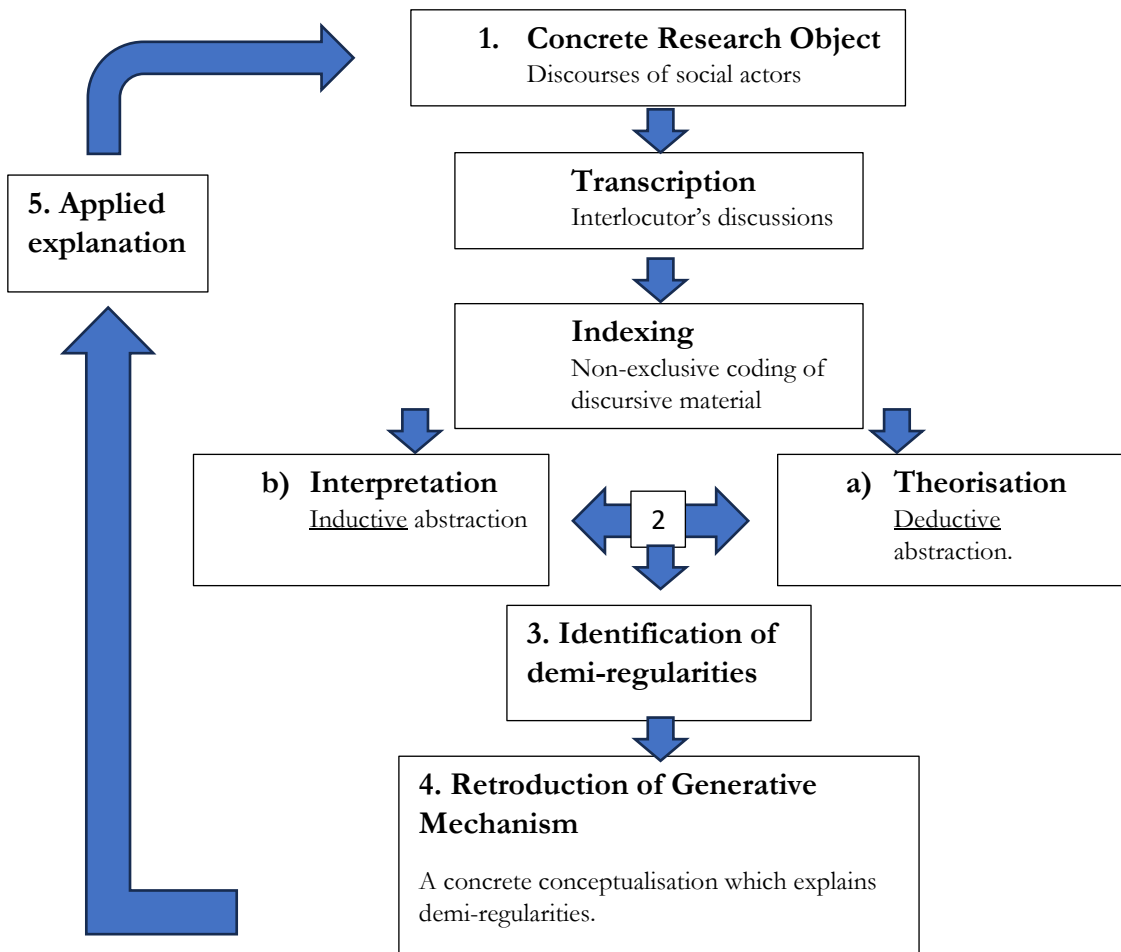


Figure 1, based on framework proposed by Ian Crinson (2007:39)

The methodological effect of this is, in effect, a search for causal mechanism that explain *why* artisans find their work meaningful. This search for knowledge must be both causal (the interlocutors say something) and interpretive (the interlocutors *mean* something).

Yet behind all this realist jargon lies one central aspect to remember: all theoretical understanding must be approached with upmost critical distance. For although CR approaches the world as theory-laden, it is crucially not *theory-determined* (Fletcher, 2017:188). The theories and ideas brought up in this text must not be seen as anything else than an explanation, not dogma, of observable phenomena; and must be dissected just as much as the text's interlocutor's experiences. Therefore, when models and theorems are proposed later in the text, the author of this text must insist that they are, at best, simplifications that nonetheless serve the function of presenting an explanation of an aspect of reality. To this end, the research also becomes an object of limited objectivity, and one should be to weary to view the analysis presented in this text as the only possible explanations for the creation of meaning. An example of the problem of objectivity in this study is the lack of technical knowledge on the part of the researcher. Artisan work is, if anything, a process of time: and a few weeks of fieldwork cannot hope to give a

lifetime of knowledge required to know the technical aspects of artisan work. With that technical knowledge comes understanding of a trade indescribable in mere words, knowledge that is certainly closer to a universal “truth”.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Concerning the ethical considerations for this thesis, utmost attention has been taken to insure the anonymity, and presentability, of the interlocutors. This has been done by following the recommendations presented by the Swedish Research Council [SE: *Vetenskapsrådet*] (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017), exemplified in Bryman (2008:131-132) recommendations for four key demands of ethics: The demand of information, the demand of consent, the demand of anonymity, and the demand of use.

The demand of information concerns the right for participants to know what their participation will be used for in the study. Before every study, both in email form and in verbal communication, the purpose and background of this study has been made expressly clear. This was done to clearly inform potential participants of the nature of the study. Furthermore, within all steps of this study, the option for “opting out” has always been present, making the participation in this thesis strictly voluntary. To this end, the demand of consent dictates that all interlocutors must give full consent to their participation in the study, and this has been of utmost importance through the work. Verbal consent has been sought before and after each interview, and all parts deemed by the participants as to personal or otherwise problematic have been removed. Furthermore, all participants have been given a copy of exactly what parts of their interview that have been used, and have been given the opportunity to comment or reassess their statements. All mentions of other people outside this study have been removed from transcriptions.

All participants in this study have been also been anonymised in according with the demand of anonymity. This anonymisation has been done to the best ability, and all that remains currently is the participants trade, place of work and gender as they were demand of essential use in the study’s result. Whilst the interviews where transcribed onto a transcription device, no names of the interlocutors were mentioned in the recorded interview. All transcriptions remain on said device, and will be destroyed after the study’s conclusion. Furthermore, all stories not deemed of importance to the text have been left outside the paper itself to further safe-guard anonymity. Finally, concerning the demand of use, all interlocutors have been informed of the nature of this

thesis, in that it will be read by both assessors and fellow students. Additionally, they have been informed that this thesis will be published on the Lund University publication form if approved.

6 THE REFLEXIVE NATURE OF ARTISAN LABOUR

To understand how meaning in artisan labour comes to construct itself reflexively, this thesis needs to first understand how artisan labour is constructed in its many parts. To do this, this segment shall first break down the three main material entanglements that constitute artisan labour: materiality, tools, and locality. From that understanding, this segment shall then examine the process from which these material relations are given animation: the process known as skill, explained in this text as a dialectic between creativity and difficulty. Finally, a discussion of creation and passion will be had as means of propulsion within artisan labour. From that breakdown, this section will end on a discussion about the creation of meaning reflexively in artisan labour.

WOOD IS WOOD

For all artisans, and ostensibly for all transformative labour, there is a physical dimension to the work that becomes the first aspect that catches one's eye. When visiting the different workshops of this thesis interlocuters, whilst the specific materials inhabiting each workshop naturally changed, their uniform prominence did not. Rows and rows of shoes were hanging amongst cobblers, wood and furniture stacked high for the furniture-makers: silver trinkets of different styles being displayed in the window of the silver smith. Material existed in the foreground in every workshop, and an artisan could express their love of a material, whilst also cursing out another, all in the same sentence. In fact, one of the most common fears expressed by artisans was a lack of material. be it by Houthi attacks in the Red Sea or by global pandemics. Seemingly, there exists a deep connection amongst artisans to their given material, both obvious, proclaimed immediately when discussing their work, and inferred, understood only over weeks of observation.

For when artisans interact with the natural world, be it creating theatre shoes or drying wood, they are also changing, *creating*, a new physical object. Artisans therefore need to know exactly how a material reacts, how it could be used, its costs and its profit. As the carpenter in Skâne explained to me concerning wood:

Wood is wood. It might look different, and some act different: but it is not too great a variation to matter [...] Those who work with textiles need to know the difference between stretchy and non-stretching fabric. It's the same with woodworking, one needs to know the material.

The process of learning these materials begins early in an artisan's career. For some of the artisans this thesis talked to, this is a process that has been constant through their entire lives.

Engaging either through family businesses, where trade-specific materials were normal, or working with material that is common enough to be approachable at an early age, the budding artisan comes to understand all the ins and outs of the given material. As the Rattan-chair maker from Stockholm explained:

My story is that this is a family company, and then you can't escape. I tried working at an office for a few years, but I still weaved cushions when I was younger after school and on breaks. In fact, whilst I was working at the office, I worked extra here [...] The weaving I knew since I was a teenager.

The tactile feeling of the material becomes, or rather demands to be, an aspect of life as second nature as walking or breathing. A cobbler, for example, needs to know that leather is the strongest in the innermost part of the skin, as that's where it connected to the spine of the animal; and to know that is where the leather for the most worn part of the shoe needs to be cut. Yet all material is not learned instantly. A silversmith working down the street from the Rattan-chair maker explained it as follows:

It all started with a silver thread at the age of 11 that I had bought from the local goldsmith. I tried to make something out of it, but it turned out awful. But when I started folk school, they had silversmithing; and I gravitated towards that.

Material connection therefore comes in many different shapes over different time-spans. For those artisans this thesis talked to who studied in more formalized institutions to start their trade, many of them highlighted the need to try a range of material in order to settle into their favourite. Regardless however, all artisans interviewed for this study settled into one key material after some time.

Tools

However, when discussing artisan's connection to material objects, one needs to go further than just the objects needed for physical creation. The material relations that signify artisan labour also bleeds into their relations with tools: the technologies which enable artisan labourers to transform objects. This became a topic of discussion when interviewing the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm. We sat down in the backroom of her workshop by a massive threading-machine, and she used it to explain an artisan's relation to their tools:

When I came here to start my work as a cobbler, my master's father was still working here: even though he was in his 80's. He eyeballed me intensely and asked "do you know what this is?" [She points to the threading machine]. I said "yes, but I can see its dirty and needs a cleaning"

Her previous master had taught her all the ins and outs of a similar machine to remove any insecurity regarding the machine.

Among the first lessons I received by my first master was how our machines worked. We had to know how they worked and why it worked to not hurt yourself or break anything. We had to clean them with small brushes and cleaning agents, disassemble them, see how they functioned internally. It wasn't clear just by looking at them exactly how they [the machines] worked [...] Just because I could accurately assess that their sowing machine was dirtier than it ought to be, I had "gotten it".

For tools do not just serve as a technology allowing the transformation of an object: tools serve just as much as social markers. Returning to the threading machine, the cobbler had, through in-depth knowledge of a machine, proven that she indeed had "gotten it". By understanding how a tool functions and how it is supposed to work (or rather, that it being dirty was bad), she had proved to her new master that she knew what she was talking about; and that she was somebody that was worthwhile teaching the trade. By knowing the physical qualities of her trades tool and how they should be treated, she had gained access to a new social realm previously unavailable to her.

From this, the tools then also become liberating agents. By knowing the tool, apprentices are allowed to learn more and more of the trade, enabling both further economic production as well as further creative possibilities. The carpenter gives an example of tools use functions:

Many of these tools you learn by using them, and choosing to use them instead of a machine. You eventually reach a point where it's sometimes faster to saw by hand rather than figuring out how to do the same thing in a band-saw. It has taken a few years to learn to saw straight without using aids and aid blocks. After a while, you know how the tool is supposed to feel in the hand. It's the same with planers and other tools, you have to hold them right.

By having learned an expanded tool use, the carpenter also expanded his capabilities concerning the craft, granting him greater freedom of acting and freedom of creation.

Understanding the interaction between material and tools becomes important to gain access to the artisan workshop. A common dismissal of apprentices was through their inability to form a connection to the material, as well as an inability to get a grasp of the tools. An example of this demand for material understanding could be seen in the traditional test a prospective cobbler needed to face to become accepted as an apprentice. The prospect is given the task to create cobbler's thread, the type of thread used when hand-sewing a shoe. They are given all the resources and instructions needed to complete the task and are expected to complete it in a week's time. If they are unable to follow this relatively simple task, then they weren't fit to become a cobbler. In other words: if they couldn't connect with the material or get a grasp of the tools of the trade, they would be rejected from joining the trade.

Locality

One final aspect of the material relations that interact with artisan labour is that of locality. If material creates the fundament that allow artisans to create, with tools being the way that creation is facilitated, then locality is what brings those two concepts together.

For some artisans, the workshops where they work represent their very ability to work: without the workshop's existence, no small-scale production can occur. When talking to the father and daughter team of furniture-restorers, it became clear that one of the reasons they were able to keep doing what they were doing was the workshops locality. It had been in the family for three generations and hosted a number of machines necessary for furniture restoration: machines that the workshop was seemingly built around in the very literal sense. Apart from that, many of the tools in the workshop were passed down antiques, some unreplaceable even with modern technology. In other words, this workshop represented a local that was already priced in, which contained the means to produce: all bound to a specific place and a specific site. Without exaggerating, these artisans labour could not exist without this locality's existence. Another example of this came from the Rattan-chair maker's workshop. She explained:

The entire Slussen-project [refurbishment project of nearby city block], I've had such bellyaches about it. X has said "deal with it when it comes, if it comes". I think it has gone way better than I thought [...] But all customers that pick up have to come here by car, if you are picking up or leaving furniture. It worries me a lot, that they will close the road to nothing but busses and cyclists. It really gives me bellyaches. It gives me almost more worry than the rent-discussions, because we are so dependent on people coming here by car.

The Rattan-chair maker is dependent on the nearby road for their business, and cannot work without it. Location as a physical place therefore becomes of utmost importance for her, and this was also the case for many artisans. Even for other artisans who did not own their local, their workshop acts as a venue for economic production, socialization with both co-workers and customers, and as an object in itself. The artisans interviewed in the old town of Stockholm were able to ply their trade in large parts because their workshops were situated in the old town. Similarly, the artisans with more remote workshops needed the space and car-accessibility those locals afforded in order to do their exact type of trade. Therefore, the local become just as important for the creation of an artisans very being as the materials they used and the tools that transformed them.

THE PROCESS OF ANIMATION

Materiality, tools, and locality are all crucial aspects in the creation project that is artisan work; yet taken alone, they are not uniquely formative. Instead, something happens to these things by the process of animation, of giving material things fluidity. Something happens through the process of skill. For artisans, skill is paramount in order to animate their labour. Through mastering both technical and creative means of expression, artisans are able to transform material, imbuing them with a state of being different from their original state. The carpenter sums this up when asked what he thought was important for his trade:

If you aren't good at it, artisan work is impossible. Artisan work is just practice, until one realises what is important for the craft.

No budding artisan can exist without having the ability to animate physical space, intertwining it with purpose and personality. Yet, what are the concrete aspects of skill, and how does this ability animate physical space? It begins by breaking down the term into two aspects: creativity and difficulty.

Creativity

The first aspect of artisan skill, creativity, is perhaps simultaneously the most straightforward aspect of their labour; and their most ethereal asset. The ability to exert your labour over objects, changing them to your liking, is certainly an exhilarating process for many of the artisans interviewed. The rattan-chair maker clarifies what is fun with making new things:

It becomes *something*. Something you haven't done before. Tray-carts are very trendy right now, and they [a customer] are talking about creating a new variant. It might sound like small potatoes, but its fun. Creating something, making it stable: and giving in a good-looking design.

Creativity as a skill becomes the technology from which internal knowledge is transferred onto the natural world. By visualising what could be done, theoretically assembling the many shapes an object can have inside ones mined, the artisan could create "infinite" possibilities before committing to one aspect. The silversmith explains it as follows:

Over the years, I think I have collected quite an extensive library in here [points to her head]. I pick things out and try them in different was, often mentally at first [...] it could be 50 different things I try before I think 'this would work'.

Furthermore, creativity for artisans become a continuous dialectic with the material world. Artisans constantly change their product according to changes in the material, like wood splintering in a different way than one was prepared for, or a chemical agent not reacting to

leather the way one expects to. Creativity can then be broached from many angles and is not just “creating objects”. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains:

We never make the same over and over again. Even if we have stretched boot-tops before, the stretching is for another pair of legs. Sure, a part of it becomes routine in the sense that you know exactly what to do: but we have never done exactly these shoes before [...] only one repair demands creative thinking.

A similar story was present amongst the other artisans that were interviewed for this study. Creativity does not stop at “making new things”, it is ever-present in all spectrums of artisan work. Repairing furniture or shoes, altering an object unnoticeably, requires creativity. Explaining to customers that certain things are doable, and more often than not, that certain things are impossible, requires verbal creativity. Seemingly, the only “none-creative” endeavour that was commonly done was accounting: which, to a degree, perhaps showcases at least some form of specificity in the application of creativity. Regardless, creativity ostensibly becomes a dialectic between cognitive ability and material reality.

Yet, creativity is in someways a learned talent. The silversmith explains it as follows:

Sometimes it is hard to explain. When you work like this, its impossible to simply build from inspiration. You have to be able to create from other avenues. Then, after all, the long experience I have of working, sketching and modelling [comes into use].

Creativity becomes a learned experience, through both formalized avenues of learning and lived experience. The apprentice learns how to creatively approach a problem from their master, or from skills that are learned from higher institutes of learning. These are seemingly useful in order to muster forward “creativity”. Yet to become a master, artisans must also internalize years and years of creative success *and* failure without being formally told anything. If we return to the material entanglement of Ingold (2001), of knowledge being learned by practice and repetition in relation to material objects, this process is seen in action in learning creativity. For without being told anything directly, yet constantly getting feedback from their labour over a wide span of time, artisans receive an “education” in creativity. It is in this aspect creativity enters its “ethereal” nature, since it seemingly becomes a product of personal will: when in reality, it might be a process of silent life-long learning. All of the interlocutors for this study said that “you have to be born with it [skill]” in regard to learning the trade. Yet this statement should perhaps rather be seen as a justification for lifelong, silent learning than a statement of truth. Creativity then moves from an ethereal, unknown dimension into something understandable: of being a process of lifelong learning where the teacher is material life.

Difficulty

The second aspect of skill for an artisan concerns the notion of difficulty. If creativity is the interaction between the cognitive mind and the physical world, then difficulty is, in a sense, the physical world pushing back. It is an aspect of skill that creates purpose: the very reason for skill being implemented in the first place. For sake of explanation, this thesis proposes that difficulty, in turn, could be divided into two categories: direct difficulty, and abstract difficulty.

Direct difficulty concerns the energy, both mental and physical, needed to complete a task. For artisans, this could take different forms. It could be the physical power needed to bend a steel pipe, the mental acuity required for reshaping silver or the fortitude to mass-produce parts for a large construction project. Regardless of which, however, it takes the form of a bodily reaction to the push and pull of the material world. The hardness of the steel, the sensitivity of silver, the drudgery of monotonous motions: all require a response from the artisan body. But through the application of skill, artisans can reduce the amount of energy needed for a given task, both in a quantitative, and in a qualitative, metric.

Abstract difficulty, however, is a measure of the *predicted* difficulty of a project not yet made manifest. For artisans, the potentiality of a problem is just as relevant as an actual problem in front of them. Will a given project run the risk of losing money in the end? Will changing tastes make my trade obsolete, and do I need to change with them? These types of challenges demand a response from artisan labourers, and usually this comes in changing patterns of acting. Importantly, this is without the material world even reacting directly to a change in energy: it simply comes to be from the inherently unknowing aspect of “the future”. Just because something “could happen” it forces a reaction from the artisans. Yet through previous learned patterns in bodied in skill, artisan can *assume* what something cost or what needs to be done. Through this, they can successfully navigate an uncertain future.

These two aspects of difficulty also bring with them two varying ways of measuring difficulty. For direct difficulty and the reactive challenges, it requires, in general, technical solutions. If a chair does not hold together, then one either needs to use better material or change the way the material is put together. This also means that this type of difficulty is easily explained and understood. Abstract difficulty, however, becomes much harder to operationalise. If one believes the problem with the chair is a matter of concept, and one chooses to make a table instead, how does one put into words the challenge the chair presented?

Regardless, these two aspects of difficulty coalesce into a force which demands the reaction of skill; but they also give skill a purpose. These learned procedures of labour are learned *because* something needs to be overcome. Without a challenge to overcome, one could simply keep on doing the same thing, and no change in ability is needed. For some of the artisans this thesis talked to, this aspect of difficulty also became important for the creation of purpose within their profession. An example of this came when the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm discussed the Latin phrase *Ne supra crepidam*. This phrase means “not beyond the shoe” and is used to tell others not to pass judgement beyond their ability. A good friend to her had made a badge for her that expanded this phrase to also say “not beyond the shoe, nobody becomes a master in a day”. She explained the reason for it:

You don't become skilful at something if you don't continue with it. 30 years ago, I wasn't as skilful as I am today. An entire working life gives you experiences that don't come to be otherwise. Those who change jobs all the time, why do they do that? The inspiration [in life] is that you constantly feel you are getting better at something, and that there are always new challenges.

Difficulty could therefore become a means to an end. In some regards, the purpose of artisan labour for the artisan is that it is *hard*. The work is challenging and demands both direct and indirect reactions from them. Whilst this difficulty could be understood from outsider, it could equally be impossible to understand. What is clear, however, is that this problem perhaps does not matter. It is perhaps in the interaction with difficulty that labour finds a meaning.

Regardless, what becomes clear is that both creativity and difficulty become reactions in different parts of the dialectic of artisan labour. Creativity is the learned force which enables a changing of material things. Yet, said material objects “react back” in the form of presenting difficulty, giving purpose to *why* something is done. The interaction of these two forces could then present an almost Sisyphean spiral of meaning. Yet, what this process leads to is a transformation of a thing, a physical product being created from the dialectic. How does this third aspect then affect the creation of meaning within artisan labour?

THE ACT OF CREATION

The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm was discussing how one comes to be a cobbler. She had started her journey with learning tailoring in secondary school, but changed directions when she was offered a job at a cobbler's workshop:

When I was a tailor, I could switch off and not sew at home. I couldn't do that when I became a cobbler: I couldn't leave [the workshop]. I had realized that you could take apart your own shoes and remake them. Everything was here [...] it was a creativity I was utterly unprepared for

This moment, of first engaging with the product of *creation*, became pivotal in creating a feeling in her unlike anything else. It had captured her in an unforeseen way, and opened the door to an entire world of creativity. Seemingly, just as artisans change an object, the object changes them back. For the first interaction with the act of creation was, in fact, quite crucial to many of my interlocutors entry into the field of artisan labour. It served as a clear focal point for when an *ability* was enabled for the first time. For the cobbler in Stockholm, this first interaction with creation was an opportunity for her to create all kinds of things. The act of creation functioned as the point of connection between matter and animation: between objects and skill.

These things created were furthermore objects that could not have existed before, both in a material sense and in a personal sense. The shoes she created/modified would not have been made without her intervention. Yet still, the act of creation enabled her to gain new modes of acting, new forms of personal agency. Creation then is the “willing” of universes, the rich interconnectedness of material and man, into being. This is further exemplified in another cobbler’s story, this time in Skåne. Here, this act of discovery started at an even earlier age. He said about his first interactions with shoe-repair at the age of 7:

‘I loved it. You create, you see a result, you can work in different ways and with different machines... it was challenging however, I had to stand on a wooden box to reach the grinder!’

This moment of creation, for him, served as an opportunity not just to create physical things, but to grow, challenge and reconfigure himself by way of *interacting* with physical space. Just as he was changing the shape of some sandals, the sandals were transforming him as well; opening up new forms of agency and action in the process of creation. This is similar to what Prentice (2012) writes about concerning skill and creation as agency: of the process of making enabling further spheres of action; not just being a process of physical production. Indeed, for every artisan interviewed for this thesis, the act of transforming something *from* something else was central to their work *and* person. It was described as a moral good, a liberating experience: and quite commonly, an active example of talent. In some way, it was even quite damaging for the artisans themselves. The carpenter explains:

I see things on furniture all the time that people wouldn’t notice. You get totally warped, going home to a friend and thinking “you know, the polish on this table is terrible”.

This damage also expanded itself into the physical dimension, with aching joints earned after years of repeated action. Regardless, both in a metaphorical sense, and a physical sense, work transforms the artisans into different people by way of transforming material: not unlike how it was presented for Najis (2020) carpet weavers.

Passion

The process of self-making that is creation and difficulty does not, however, paint the entire story of how meaning is created within artisan labour. Many of these studies interlocutors had thirty to forty years of experience in their trade, and for some, artisan labour had been present their entire life. The question then becomes what keeps these artisans going: what becomes their means of propulsion; what becomes their passion. Is it the structures of artisan labour as a process that create passion, or is it the artisan as personalities that, when given space, lend themselves to obsession. In this segment, both possibilities shall be broached.

Regarding the enabling of passion, as written before, many of the artisans interviewed for this study found themselves first engaging with their labour when put in a position to *do* so. For the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler, without being introduced to the cobbling workshop, the physical space representing potentiality, she perhaps wouldn't have known just how much she was able to do in her work. Without being born into a cobbling family, a physical representation of internalized and enabling skill, the cobbler from Skåne might not have been able to come into contact with the skills of the trade at all. The physical materialities of the workshop might therefore be the enabler for passion. The carpenter explained the growth of his traditional machine-park, which had become somewhat of a symbol of his business:

I had modern machines before, then I got that machine behind you. It was just standing around at a farm in Kristianstad, and the people there wanted to just get rid of their old machines. At first, I thought that it was junk that could not be used, but later I thought it might be of use. It was a milling machine, and I put on a motor on it and made it function. I had filmed it when I got it, and put it up on the internet: people became very interested. Additionally, I had all the attachments that came with the machine. The machine is from 1898, and is entirely complete and in tiptop shape. Then I got that planer over there, that was because an old man called and had seen my video. He thought it was fun how I had gotten the machine working again, and wondered if I wanted a planer. When I picked it up, I got the bill of sale, the catalogue: everything that came with it from the beginning. Then it just continued. I would like to claim that I have not collected, just accumulated.

Because the machines were old and unique, a new purpose was created for the carpenter: as the act of coming into regular contact with machines *embodied* with history enabled a grander narrative in his labour to be created; propelling the potentiality of his labour to further frontiers.

Going beyond tools and upbringing, a possible way passion is created in artisan labour is through the material itself serving as a *reactive* partner. The material, reacting to strikes and blows, morphing its physical shape, and as was established earlier, morphing the artisan in turn, might prove to be the greatest partner a worker can ask for. Ever changing, ever demanding, and ever

developing, the interaction with the material itself might provide a development of passion. Seeing something develop in front of their eyes was an important motivator for many of the artisans interviewed in this study.

Regardless of what material enabler is dominant, however, all these material aspects are uniform in that they enable the possibility to act creatively, to act with passion, and to keep acting that way through time. Material enablers construct a process of propulsion for the act of labour, born out of material entanglement, that enables its purpose to develop beyond just “doing”. However, perhaps its the other way around. Perhaps the structures that enable passion are rather a by-product of passionate people creating their own reality. Perhaps it is the artisans as personalities that lend themselves to passion, or even obsession. Certainly, all this studies interlocuters were what could be conservatively called “strong personalities”. These artisans were head-strong people, forging, forcing, a living in something that they love. As was a common theme in all interviews, every artisan stressed that to make money, one should either win the lottery or quit being an artisan. The carpenter explains:

Like my master said to me when I did my apprenticeship “if you want to earn money as a carpenter, you have to start a business and hire people: and then don’t do any work yourself. I though “god that’s boring”. To run a business within carpentry, you have to make decisions about how you want to have it. You can run a business with lots of carpenters and live quite well of that. But we think “how much money do we need to make each month to stay afloat? Lets aim for that”. Everything over is a bonus.

In fact, sometimes, just because a project was interesting, an artisan could take fees that were less than average just to be able to do them (although this was rare, as its surefire way to go out of business). Regardless, the question remains then if one can even be “passionless” in a job that one has sacrificed for. Have these artisans simply created a reality that could only exists *because* they are passionate. Is this one of, if not the, reason for artisan labour being so rare in modern capitalism?

Yet, if both aspects are taken into consideration, of both material enablers and strong-willed people, one could propose that the project of passion is a mutual project shared between person and structure. This could be exemplified by turning to the example of small-business economics. For all of the artisan that were talked to, this was the question that was most often brought home after the end of a working day. The question of accountancy, profitability and survival were universal, and crucially, usually outside the skillset of artisan labourers. You cannot strike and shape your way out of an accounting error. However, the matter of economic prosperity was paramount, and constantly brought home as the main thing to curse about before going to bed. Why? Partly, it is the structure of small-businesses that enable this. Just as Rivers (2023) noted in

her study, many of this study's interlocutors strived for "just enough". The artisans were not anti-capitalist knights valiantly fighting the kraken of neoliberal capitalism, but small-businessmen looking to survive just enough to do what they want to do. With that, artisans naturally worry about the economic future of their endeavours. This worry is a product of structure, born out of the uncertainties of small-business ownership. Yet at the same time, it is also a product of personality. Not all people could, or would, bring these issues home. Certainly, not all people would take all the stress of running a small business, instead sacrificing some operational freedom for some piece of mind. Passion here, enabling the power to do things you do not want to do, could then equally be a product of both personality and structure.

AN APPROACH TO MEANING AS REFLEXIVE

Returning to this thesis first question of how meaning in artisan labour is created reflexively, it becomes apparent, through an inductive analysis of the previously presented data, that it is a matter of material interaction.

Artisan labour creates itself reflexively through the dialectic between physical space and skill. Here, physical space creates the material grounds for artisans to react to, and through, three aspects of material: materiality, tools and locality. These aspects are then animated, changed, by the creative process. This creative process is summarized as skill, a learned pattern of behaviour that simplifies the changing of physical material. Yet the process of animation only has purpose, and is therefore only done, *because* there exists a physical presence that needs to be altered. Skill and physicality therefore exist in relation to one another, creating and change each other continually. The product of this dialectic is the creation of material things, which is called the process of creation. It comes to both represents things being done (labour) and things being created (creation). This process can have value in its own creation, but is most commonly propelled, moved into being, by the passion created by artisans in their engagement with materiality. The effect of this becomes a creation of meaning fashioned from the reflexive reaction of artisan labour with the material world, spurred on by supporting structures of the artisans own making. Meaning in artisan labour could therefore be a product of artisan's own entanglement with labour: giving both shape, and purpose, to their work by the process of *doing*. This process is summarized in the figure on the next page (figure 2).

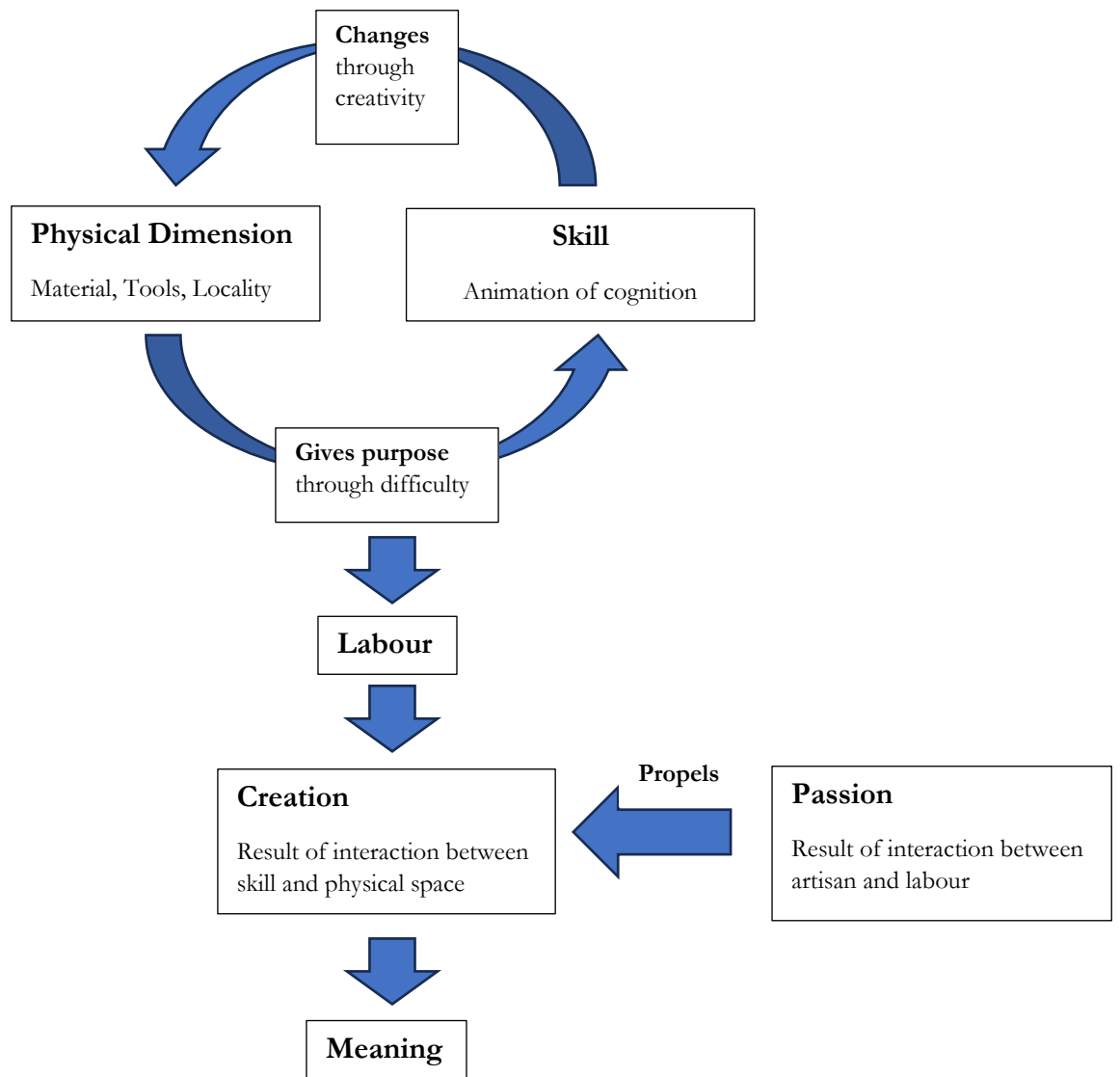


Figure 2.

Deductive Conclusions on Reflexivity

The argument explained in figure 2 is, however, only one part of the equation that is the reflexive creation of meaning. Returning to the theoretical segment, what more can be said about the creation of meaning in a reflexive sense?

One could start by analysing this figure 2 from Foucauldian notions of self, starting with the view that artisans have become subjects of their labour, and in that, found their meaning. The dialectic of artisan labour, seen through a simplified view, is a structure to which the artisans subjugate themselves towards (Faubion & Rabinow, 2000). The artisans have subjugated themselves towards the norms and constrain of the institutions of artisan labour, here being the aspects of materiality, animation, creation and passion. Through that, the artisans become enabled by their perimeters. They receive new wonderful abilities through the limitations of their trade, as skill acquisition becomes necessitated through said limitations: giving examples of

enabling aspects of subjugation that Taylor (2010:173) discusses. Through this reflexive interaction with their limitations, the artisans create new things, act in new ways: in a sense, create transformative dialectics; and create the structure by which meaning is created.

Furthermore, this creating of meaning happens in a subjective sense by the artisans creating an idealized view of their labour. Here, artisans create a barometer, a measurable relation, to their self in the form of an idealized view of their labour (Foucault, 1990). This idealization then becomes the way artisans can critically reflect upon themselves, and enables them to strive towards a grander purpose: always giving them something to work towards or improve. Yet, this internal creation also becomes a threat to them. If the passion of artisan labour is removed, if the ability, both cognitively or mentally, to create is taken away: then the artisans are removed from their very way of creating meaning. One striking aspect in this thesis fieldwork is hearing that many artisans never retire. This is not because they lack financial means, but because by doing it, they are removing the very thing that creates meaning for them in their life. They are removed from their idolised view of self, left lost and abandoned as they have forgone the very way their self has constructed its own creation of meaning (Skinner, 2012).

However, if artisan subjugate themselves towards objects: they are, at the same time, transforming the objects themselves in turn. This material entanglement shapes the physical and cultural dimension of objects and structures just as much as the material shapes the artisans in turn. In another light, the product of a system is only possible through the production process that enables it, and that process is formed by *values* (Graeber, 2001). By seeing what value is produced, or rather premiered, in a given system, one is able to see what values that system has. For artisan labour, at least in this example, the value that this system produces reflexively is that of self-making: The main product of the system for the artisans that work within it is not product or money, but purpose, a meaning to one's labour. What the system then values are enablers to this end: material entanglement, skill, passion, creation. These are not structures to adhere to and conform to, but are acts good *in themselves*, and crucially, structures that are changed in turn from the value production they enable. What the system then creates is also structures enabling this process. In a sense, the artisans are producing the system which produces meaning for artisans; creating, in turn, the very existence of artisans as a vocation.

The reflexive demi-regularity

Finally, with both these inductive and deductive analyses in mind, this segment can return to the first question of this thesis: how is meaning in artisan labour created reflexively? In its simplest

form, meaning in artisan labour is created reflexively through the agency of artisans with the objects of their labour.

To expand, however, what becomes clear from the inductive analysis is that the creation of meaning within artisan labour is something actively pursued by its creators. Artisans, by wilfully making and responding to the material world, instil a sense of purpose within their work, giving them a sense of pride and accomplishment in their exertion of energy. The material world, in turn, reacts back, always pushing the artisan to keep doing what their doing. What is created here is a dialectic of purpose; always pushing each other forward in engaging with the material world. The effect of this dialectic is the labour system of artisan labour.

Meaning in artisan labour therefore comes into being through the reflexive interaction of person and material, with meaning becoming both the product of this dialectic and the reason for its very existence in the first place. Meaning, in this labour context, is therefore created by, and for, artisan labour. The deductive analysis then comes into use here for questioning what agency is to be had for the artisans in its construction. If meaning is to be had for artisans in their labour as a product of reflexivity, then it must also stand to reason that artisans change the very system they inhabit constantly through this reflexive interaction. In this, at least insofar one can discuss from this thesis own findings, artisans as actors therefore have to be active, engaged agents willing and able to change the system they are operating in. The question then becomes if artisan labour is really an adherence to a subjugation, and not, instead a, circular act. Put differently, do the artisans not become objects of power *in themselves* instead of passive subjects of structure. Is, for example, the application of skill, the animation of physical space, then not also a question of power-application between two forces? To that end, one can view the interaction of agency for artisan workers as either blissfully submissive, as is the case for a Foucauldian view, or crucially active, as is the case for value-based, Graberian notions of collective creation.

7 ARTISAN LABOUR IN RELATION

The question of how artisan labour is experienced “in relation” is really about mapping the most crucial structural forces affecting labour, without said forces coming directly *from* reflexive creation. Put simply, it means understanding what the relational aspects are that interact and shape artisans outside structures of their own creation. To do this, this segment will first describe and deconstruct three foundational social relations for artisans observed during the course of this thesis fieldwork: family, guilds and customers. From this, a discussion will be had about two important structural forces affecting artisan labour, simplified here into two forces: temporal and power. From this, this segment shall then examine how both social and structural forces coalesce in order to shape what it means to create meaning in relation in artisan labour.

FAMILY

In the history of artisan labour, family is central. It was from the family unit that production was organized, and through family that businesses were passed down. Even if the changing of societal production systems lead to a de-prioritization and “businessification” of artisan labour, family still occupies an important role for many artisan workshops to this day. That was certainly the case of many of this study’s interlocuters. It was not uncommon to hear artisans proudly proclaim that their workshop was third or fourth generational: with some even doing their trade as far back as concrete records go. The rattan-chair maker, for example, proudly told in an interview for this thesis that their business telephone-number originally had just 4 numbers: the standard nowadays being 8⁴. Furthermore, if not directly through family, some of the artisans this thesis talked to at least found some grounding in that they had inherited/bought a lineaged workshop; a workshop that has been active within the same trade, or within general artisan production, for some time. Their seemingly exists an importance in family for artisans, but why is this?

Firstly, at least for the artisans this thesis interviewed, family gives economic support. It enables a diversification of tasks between workers, and economically allows a workshop to produce more than it otherwise would have; as family members helping out reduce both wage-bills and increases output. This diversification could be seen in the rattan-chair workshop:

We have our places of work, our work areas. You need to be able to share the burden if it’s going to work.

We were 4 here before, dad and grandpa. We had another employee here as well, as well as grandma frying

⁴ 3 and 4 numbered telephone-numbers where the original numbers introduced in Sweden with the advent of the telephone

pork on the burner in the corner. You can just imagine, and everybody smoked: that's just how it was. In fact, it was a death sentence [socially] to go outside and smoke.

Here, more work is done *because* all members of the family are involved in economic activity. Even family-members not actively making the rattan-chairs, like the grandmother, helps in what way they can. To exemplify further, when interviewing the father and daughter team of furniture restorers, it became quite clear that without family ties, the business could simply not stay afloat. The father loved working in the workshop, and that freed up the daughter to handle customer relations, auction circuits and furniture valuation. Crucially, however, this allowed business to flow into the workshop itself. Moreover, when the father's father was still alive, he too helped out in the limited ways he could. The relationship of family was the very reason this workshop existed.

Family also serves the function of passing down skills and knowledge. This is because through the structures that family creates, knowledge and skills are passed down continuously, or at least enabled to be learned. For many of the artisans in family businesses that were interviewed, the craft had been an active part of their entire lives. They had learned, both actively by being taught, and passively by watching, the essentials of their trade over a long period of time. This mastery gave some artisans unparalleled *tacitly* learned skills. Furthermore, for some artisans, there existed unique "family secrets" that allowed them to further develop with their trade, either simplifying production or enabling new commodities to be made. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains:

Its not easy for small artisan workshops, who are often alone in their company, to take in an apprentice if they are not known beforehand through the family. Its a question of bringing in somebody new, betting it all on them, and then not getting anything in return. A few businesses have trouble with this, you have to be prepared to commit a lot of time.

Yet, family also allowed people outside family-driven trades to learn their art. For the carpenter, his introduction into the art of woodworking came from his family past of boatbuilding. Even though his father had worked his life as an engineer, and his mother was a textile-consultant, he was, through their family history, given opportunities to come into contact with the trade by way of family pass-times; which for his family was woodworking. For the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler in Stockholm, even though her parents were not cobblers, they had supported her will to study textile work at secondary school against the recommendations of the school's teachers. Her family, in a sense, gave her the possibility to explore her abilities. Family therefore becomes important to achieve skills and knowledge.

Finally, and perhaps most important, family gave the artisans this thesis talked to a sense of purpose. This was perhaps the most common view on family for the interlocutors. This could take the form of family being embedded in material things. Working with their grandparents' tools was seen as a point of pride for many, and in using them, created a sense of their trades embodied past flowing through their hands. It could also be the physical locals, nicked and changed by many generations of workers, making some reluctant to just letting it go. Some artisans also expressed wanting to leave their firms in the hand of their own children for those reasons (although all stressed that their children would have a choice in the matter).

Furthermore, when facing economic or identity-based hardships, it was through the family connection that running the company was given meaning. The rattan-chair maker explains:

I usually tell people that in my next life I want to do something else. Yet, you can't shut down completely, even if we are moving into harder times. You have to think that this place has survived two world wars, you have to just hunker down and think "we will solve this as well". It's kind of fun. There are multiple artisans I know that are third or fourth generation here in Stockholm. It's the same thing there.

Guilds

Family then, for where it was present, served as an important structure for artisan labour. Yet, one also has to consider the adopted family of artisan labour: that of the guild connection. For although, as written earlier, guilds in the traditional sense do not exist anymore in Sweden, labour and business associations still serve the vital economic rolls these guilds once occupied (and for ease of reference will be called guilds from here on out).

Many of this study's interlocutors were currently serving, or had served, in some form of guild-association: either within their own trade or within wider organisations (like the Swedish Craft Association). The reasons for why these artisans became active within their guild-associations varied. For some, they became active to meet colleagues. Artisan life can be quite lonely, especially if one does not have an apprentice or other workers working within the same space, and according to some of the interlocutors, the guild associations provide a form of socialization ground for them. However, for many, it goes a bit deeper than that. The cobbler from Skåne explains:

I work together with [the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm], we usually work at Skansen together⁵. I am going up on Friday. [The shoemakers guild] is a network, it is the contacts: it's the solidarity of the organisation... [the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm] and I supported each other a lot during the pandemic. Then, of course, it's how I usually say: you can't have everything served on a

⁵ Skansen is an open-air museum in Stockholm that showcases many traditional Swedish handcrafts.

silver plate. We have lobbied against the sales tax⁶ when the government raised it, if we hadn't done that then perhaps it would have been raised even more. [The shoemakers guild] is solidarity, it's our union outwards.

Seemingly, the guilds, here exemplified with the shoemaker's, serve as a form of *solidarity* between its members: existing both as a socializing organisation *and* economic organisation. An example of this also came from the shoemaker's union. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains:

When we joined the EU, there was a possibility to have educations: you could have EU-projects. Back then, a colleague from Gävle and myself saw a whole bunch of projects starting both there and here in Gamla Stan. We started thinking if the Shoemaker's Guild could receive funding for Sweden's cobblers. We went to the ESF-council, and asked if it was possible. They said it was regional, and that they would sit and do an assessment. We stood our ground, and one supervisor came and said 'this was the most absurd thing ever: here are two women who want to educate all their competitors throughout the country. If you receive 250 000kr, would you think that's enough?'. You don't say no to that type of money.

Artisan-guilds seemingly transpose past the regular functions of business organisations, as exemplified here. The guilds become a form of organisation working in consort with all its members, even if market logic might dictate otherwise.

Another unique way guilds operate is their adherence to tradition. As proprietors of, according to the artisans themselves, hundreds of years of tradition, artisan guilds and associations have received a unique responsibility to pass down the traditions of their trades to future generations. This could be done through maintaining trade-specific archives, publishing of historical material or organisation of artisan meets (Hellgren, 2010; Hantverkarna, n.d). But returning to the statement by the cobbler from Skåne, one can see that artisan guilds also have a drive to educate people *outside* their own membership core in matters of trade. By pushing for cobblers to showcase *how* they work, ostensibly for free at places like Skansen, the guilds are actively trying to educate a generalized mass. Apart from the cobblers, within the old town of Stockholm, organized "artisan" tours are also held in order to reach the same effect: where tours of people are allowed to visit the different workshops of artisans to gain a better understanding of their work. Of course, in both these examples, there is also an unavoidable economic angle, as familiarization leads to increased sales. Yet these types of endeavours should instead be seen as a

⁶ The sales tax on repair work was raised from 6% to 12% as of 2022.

⁷ In total, the Cobblers union received 2 million kr from the EU to educate around 100 cobblers. The 250 000kr was for a preliminary analysis.

product of *both* economic and social interests. In a sense, they become the materialisation of the guilds themselves.

In this adherence to tradition, guilds provide an important legitimizing and ceremonial role for their members, and this important role could most easily be seen in their role in providing journeyman papers and masters certificates. These two documents represent some of the most important pieces of legitimization an artisan can receive, and are true lynch-pins within artisan lives. Journeyman-papers represent the official point of transition from apprentice to fellow, and are earned (generally) after three years of apprenticeship and a final examination. What is done for this examination varies from trade to trade, but in general is supposed to be a testament of a prospecting artisan's skill. This examination is judged by more senior artisans, both as a means to accurately assess the quality of an apprentice's work, as well as providing a ceremonial "passing the torch" role. The carpenter explains what he did for his exam:

I did a table in the Gustavian style [French Neoclassicism, see picture 1]. I was one of the few who did an 1800-century piece of furniture that actually looks like how it did then: not just a bunch of brown wood. The 1800-century was very colourful, the pieces have just lost their colour over the years.



Picture 1. The Carpenters Gustavian-style table.

Traditionally, these tests would then have been followed up a few years later with a master's test (Hantverkarna, n.d). Whilst these masters' tests also showcase some sort of technical ability, they are mainly to prove an artisan's ability to successfully manage a business; and would historically, through their acquisition, have allowed the artisans to run their own workshop. If an artisan completes this test, they are allowed to call themselves "masters". The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains how it works for them:

The tests look different, and are presented from the board with what exactly they have to contain. We have just updated the rules. Now we have a much harder journeyman test, more encompassing, because we have changed how we do journeyman and masters tests.

These two documents, the journeyman papers and the master's letter, are important for many artisans in order to showcase their proficiencies to potential customers, and remain a way to maintain some form of skill-based exclusivity in the respective trade: as one cannot get these papers outside the guilds. For many of the artisans this study talked to, these papers represent one of the few markers of quality left for their customers. Furthermore, these two pieces of paper become important moments of ceremony for artisans. As some artisans explain, it's one of the few times artisan and manual labour is celebrated to the same degree as academic success is. These documents and rituals therefore become important markers for the trades own view of self-worth.

Times are changing for the artisans however. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains:

We have found it difficult for people to do their master-tests, for when you are in business and working: why do a week's work just for a piece of paper? It can take a week to do all the tests, and why do that when you have a business to run? We want people to do the masters tests, it's a way of maintaining competence. You have to be a master to judge new journeymen, and we are losing the masters. It's like doing an entire PHD and not presenting your thesis [...] Now we have changed it so you have to have check all the boxes in one test, to then work for 6 years to apply to be a master. Under those 6 years, you should have refined your work.

Seemingly, not all who reach the proficiency of masters needs to do a masters test in order to prove themselves. For some, this is because of economic reasons: as the cobbler said, it's hard to justify leaving one's workshop for an entire week. However, for others, it's a question of skill-based decline. The rattan-chair maker explains this:

I have not taken it [the masters test] even though I would gladly do it. The reason for this is that there really isn't anybody to accurately judge my skills: well except my dad, but that would just be damn weird. Because of that, I have had no interest in taking the test.

Guilds then occupy both a point of expansion for artisans, enabling meaning through legitimizations and ceremony, but also might become structurers that by their existence, or rather "non" existence, become detrimental to the creation of meaning. One of the most common concerns for many of the artisans this study talked to was the worry in passing on their trade to future generations *because* of a lack of structural support. In this, for many artisans, the question

of “what is it all for” became common: a question partly born out of the problems of formalized legitimization through guilds that no longer existed to the degree they once did.

Customers

Finally, approaching the last of the three foundational social relations that affect artisan labour; that being the artisan’s relation to their customers. Customers represent, at the same time, both the lifeblood of artisans and their very worst enemy. It is customers that dictate what is to be done in regards to production, but the same customers also have next to no knowledge about the subject from which they are demanding something to be done. Put simply, if a person would know how to make a silver ring of the same quality that an artisan can make, they would (generally) just make it: and not go to the bother of asking somebody else to do it. For this breakdown, this segment shall therefore approach the topic from two angles: one of mutual creation, and one of continuous friction.

The creator-customer relation is quite fundamental to the current functioning of artisan labour, and this relationship has ostensibly existed for as long as the trades has, well, been used for trading. The silversmith explains how this relationship effects what she produces:

It varies. To use an example, somebody might ask ‘my wife is turning 60, and I would like to give her a beautiful neckless. I have seen through your window over the years that you make that. Would you have an idea what to do?’. I would then ask the customer to describe their wife, how she looks. Some stuff that would allow me to get an estimation. I could even make a simple drawing. But sometimes the customer themselves have ideas, and I sometimes can do it: but it could sometimes be unrealistic. Then you have to make adjustments to the piece in order for the material to work.

This negotiation over production was, in fact, quite common for many of the artisans this thesis talked to, and becomes important in defining what the artisan can actually do with their time. In some cases, it is this relationship that is most important in production for some artisans. The cobbler from Skåne explained when asked what he loved the most about his job:

It’s always the customers. I knew somebody that had a flower shop in town, and their father was from Malmö. The owner had sold the shop, and they said “I don’t miss the store, but I miss the customers.” It’s always the customers. If you are happy to talk to people, have a good relationship with the customers, then you have a good business.

From this relationship of creator-customer, artisans find it important to explain what exactly the customer is asking when ordering a product. The rattan-chair maker explains:

When it concerns private customers, they come down here [to the workshop]. It is pretty important they come down here, see what we do, understand it takes time; and that there is real effort behind everything.

Otherwise, it's hard for them to know when they just buy a chair for a few hundreds, or want to change a rattan-cushion from 1900, or wanting handwoven stuff. But if they know [it's a handcraft], they find it important.

The creation of a discerning customer, understanding of the time-demands and skill needed for production, seemingly becomes important for artisans to do their labour smoothly. This need for discerning customers was also apparent when this thesis talked to some artisans about the price they set for their wares, with many of them sometimes charging below-than-average prices for their work when presented with somebody "in the know": not unlike what Ranganathan (2018) gathered in her study.

All customers are not created equally, however. This was apparent in many of my interlocutor's distinction between private and corporate customers. The carpenter explains:

I work a lot with a design firm in Malmö, and they know exactly what they want. They design what they want, they just don't know how to put it together. With that, I don't have much to say in the matter, its more 'this is how it's supposed to look, you fix how it comes together: then send the bill' [...] With private customers, there is more of a discussion. I prefer to meet like this, when people come here to discuss. It's easier to show people things here than at their home, because then I have to bring about 100 things. Pretty often there is somebody who has seen a piece of furniture on that god-awful website called Pinterest. They want something from there that's often copywrite-protected, as there is a lot of furniture that is protected in one way or another. I know I'm not allowed to build the same pattern; I have to change something [...] The customer has to decide, then you have to reach an agreement for a final date of adjustment: especially when you are dealing with kitchens. The nightmare scenario is when you get the call 'I have googled a bit, and I'll like to change the facings', having just completed all the facings. You more or less have to write a contract with private customers of these things, especially with kitchens. They are very personal!

Here, one can begin to see the friction that becomes apparent in the creator-customer relationship. None of this study's interlocutors ever said they despised the customers that were buying their services, and, at least according to this thesis view, one can hardly think they held that opinion in secret: as customer relations are too fundamental to the labour for them to conjure up active hostility. Yet, many of the frictions within artisan labour came from this relationship. One aspect of this was the way their labour was solicited. Over the years, more and more people have started contacting them over email and social media, forums quite far removed from the natural flow of the workshop. Put in another way, the artisans this thesis talked to do not hover over their computer like office workers might do: and that difference in means of communication sometimes leads to stress for both actors; as they cannot effectively communicate the process of production to one another. This difference in lifestyle also created friction when it came to the time necessitated *by* projects the customers brought in. Artisans and

their often office-worker clientele have different schedules, especially as a result of more distance work being done in office work. For artisans, this sometimes leads to working uncomfortable or long hours, sometimes weekends, in order to meet the deadlines set out by the customers.

TEMPORALITY & POWER

This discussion of family, solidarity and creator-customer relations showcase some of the fundamental social structures affecting artisan labour, shaping its very possibilities to be done. However there also exists forces effecting their trades on a more abstract level outside socialized structures: concerning instead abstract forces pushing and pulling on what it means to be an artisan. This segment will identify two possible forces that became apparent in the fieldwork, time and power. These forces affecting artisan labour could, in turn, further an understanding of how the creation of meaning is done within artisan labour.

Time

Artisan labour is deeply affected by forces of temporality. Be it the power of the past shaping the future in the form of tradition shaping future action, or the forces of the present recontextualising what exactly is history, forces of time drive what it means to be an artisan. To explain this, one can look how this form of labour is shaped by the past, the present and the future in unique ways: with a focus on purpose and embodied materiality experienced through the past, presence and future.

Time and Purpose

Time bringing purpose could perhaps best understood in this context in the effect of “history” driving the current application of artisan labour. The carpenter explains it like this:

The cultural heritage with being a carpenter is that I can create stuff that lasts, and that the knowledge still exists and is living: and not something you read in an old book about how it maybe happened.

For the carpenter, this active use and continuation of a historical past gave him a purpose in his labour, something quite common to hear from all my interlocutors. History can, however, take many forms. It could be the continuation of family traditions *because* they are “historic”; because time as been imbued in the trades being. It could be the continuation of certain artisan skills *because* there is a purpose in maintaining them, be it for personal or “cultural” reasons. The historical aspect of their trades brings artisans new purposes in the present, and acts as a force of propulsion for their very way of labour.

The present, however, also brings with it new forms of purpose. One aspect could be the rehabilitation of historical techniques, in effect *saving* them from the past. The carpenter explains this:

It's the thing when you get to work with traditional material in an old way. People who appreciate old handcraft, not just wanting you to throw something together. People who say "wow, you can build furniture with veneer". Veneer in particular has received a bad reputation because of how many modern types of furniture use it, often badly made. I love veneer, you could do fantastic things with it.

By rehabilitating veneer, the carpenter is able to bring this technique new purpose in the present, in effect *saving* it from the past. The present then becomes the force that shapes what is contemporary, what is acceptable concerning tastes and consumption.

The present also gives purpose on its own, as it acts as the arena for changing one's agency; for it is in the present one *does* and *learns*. It becomes an *enabler* of purpose. If we return to a previous comment by the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm:

You don't become skilful at something if you don't continue with it. 30 years ago, I wasn't as skilful as I am today. An entire working life gives you experiences that don't come to be otherwise. Those who change jobs all the time, why do they do that? The inspiration [in life] is that you constantly feel you are getting better at something, and that there are always new challenges.

Her pursuit of knowledge happens in "the now", and act as the propelling force of her labours purpose. The present, by way of "happening now", also becomes a force that propels her into new experiences.

Finally, the future also acts as a force that *brings* purpose. This could best be exemplified in the new purpose felt for many artisans: that of their role in the reorientation of society as a reaction towards climate change. The cobbler from Skåne explained this when asked if anything's changed in the last years of his trade:

It's the environmental thinking. The last five years, many people have bought stuff on second hand or bought old shoes that they want help in restoring. They try to buy quality. There is an EU-directive that's coming that forces the right to repair.

This collective reorientation has brought with it new patterns of consumption, giving a new niche for artisans. The rattan-chair maker has also had similar changes in consumption:

More from your generation [Gen-Z] are coming in, and finding older pieces of furniture to restore and splurge on. They have either inherited or bought second hand. It does not have to be worth a lot of money, but they know its quality. Its genuine rattan through and through, and that's worth spending money on. It's really fun to see.

This, for many artisans, becomes a reorientation towards a new future: changing their reason for working after a potential future orientation. Because something *might* happen, customers and the artisans themselves are reacting towards the future; changing the patterns of purpose through a force not yet existing in the present. This potentiality is nothing short of invigorating for artisans, and also becomes important for negotiating their current existence as one that “will soon be crucial”.

Time and Materiality

Concerning seeing the forces of temporality in embodied materiality, this segment could first turn to the father and daughter furniture restorers’ tools. Some of the tools they had were originals from the 16th and 17th century, not just because it gave some form of meaning to work with older tools: but because it was *impossible* to work without them. They simply couldn’t be replicated in their application, and were therefore treated with upmost care. The same was true for other artisan procession: some of the tools were simply not made anymore. The *past*, embodied in these tools, therefore enabled them to do their work, forming a sort of materiality enabled by temporality. To go further in this argumentation, the profession of furniture restoration becomes a good example of time, in this case the past, giving reason to the present through materiality. Because the objects the furniture restores work on are deemed historic, their restoration is deemed important. From that, care and skill are needed to restore the objects: creating the profession of furniture restorers. For the father and daughter furniture restorers, their way of business only exists *because* of history. This was common for some of the other artisans as well, where the past becoming materially embodied in objects created the reason for their labour: in a sense, people want historic types of trade simply *because* they are historic. This is similar to what Gibson (2016) saw in the study of bootmakers in El Paso, where the past as a lived experience became one of the very reason production of boots was possible at all.

Temporality’s effect on materiality could also be seen in the *present* in the creation of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Symbolising the state when difficulties are surmountable yet engaging, flow, at least for this study’s interlocutors, becomes a moment of real time manipulation. Time, in a very real way, passes faster when “in the zone”, yet this is only done through the interaction with materiality.

Yet, time as a force in the present is really about control of your own time. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains why she keeps going to work:

I’ve never had any resistance in going to work. I just don’t feel ‘ow no, not today again’. Never happened, as there are no incitements to do anything else [...] The trend now of people changing jobs all the time is

about getting a higher salary at the new job. You don't like what you are doing if you want to change. If you like what you are doing and want more money, then you are really wanting to do something else. Perhaps you want have more money to play golf. I don't have to play golf; I want for nothing here.

For her, a part of the reason she loved her work was that she was in control over it. This was quite common to hear from other artisans as well. What this comes to represent is control over your own *time*. Mastery over production is, for this study's interlocutors, mastery over the embodied aspect of time.

Another way to see temporality affecting materiality could be the changing of objects to do something with them *in the future*. When interviewing the carpenter, he was currently air-drying wooden planks for future use. He explained why:

Many projects take a long time, and you have to be ready beforehand. I have a project on the way, we won a project-bidding from the Church of Sweden. That was 2020, the work is starting 2026: we have already collected the wood and sawed planks that are drying especially for that job. A lot of money, but also a lot of work. The question then becomes: will I have time with all this before the job starts?

In other words, he was changing the material composition of objects for using in an *assumed* moment in time many years in advance. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm was doing the same thing with a unique pair of theatre-shoes, setting aside the material they used for the shoes in case that exact play gets put on again in the future. What they were doing in these examples were setting the ground-work for agency in the future by way of material change now. In effect, the artisans were changing their potential ways of agency with direct material interventions, all done because of knowing time progresses; i.e., the force of *time*.

Power Relations

The second force that became apparent in the stories of artisans was that of power-relations: the very act of something existing in a physical space, and through that act, affecting and changing social dynamics.

The specific material relations this force *could* take has been described earlier in the discussion about materiality, but it's more abstract dimensions are equally important in order to understand how meaning is created *in relation*. To discuss this, this segment will break down two forces that became apparent as products of power in the fieldwork: control and collective negotiations.

Control

Control is everything for artisans and artisan labour. For many artisans, the main benefit of having an independent business is "being your own boss": being able to control your working

hours, how stuff is done, and your relations to both customers and fellow artisans. As the carpenter puts it:

When I start going to school, I was always the person who had a difficult time understanding why my teachers couldn't explain something to me. I have a clear memory of middle school when I had started geometry, and I asked my teacher how one came to know the value of Pi. The teacher couldn't explain *where* the value of 3.14 came from.

The carpenter continues with this line of thought a bit later in the interview:

I have chosen to do everything myself, because it's cheaper. It might cost time, but it costs less money: which enables me to work less. I think I've always been a small businessman, because I've never been able to work at a workplace with a set schedule. I've always been a bit stubborn when it comes to these things.

One of the main reasons for this choice of career seemingly becomes a product of wanting control. This also extends to the material dimension of artisan labour, where mastery over objects, the imbedding of skill on a physical world, could also be seen as an attempt to control said world: shaping it according to one's own wishes.

Yet, to say that artisans have complete control of their trade is nebulous at best. By the very nature of how artisan production is laid out, control is actively negotiated away daily. This takes many forms. The most obvious would be when negotiating with a customer's wishes, the artisan leases away control in order to receive economic prosperity. This experience was something experienced by stone-masons of Jones and Yarrow (2013). Yet, going beyond customers, the social relationship *between* artisans in workshops also constitute a moment of control-loss.

Sharing a workshop with other artisans means negotiating norms and standards that need to be adhered to. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains:

Part of it is finding a person who fits in this environment where you are so on top of each other all day long. You can't go to your own corner, and you passed our employee lounge earlier [gestures to a small corridor where one can hang a coat]. You can't say 'I want to sit here, leave me be', we are together all the time

This is, if anything, a moment of collective ownership of space. Yet, even in uneven power-relations, like that between the master and the apprentice, control is given away as well. For by taking an apprentice, the artisans have to give up productive time, and if not that, personal time, to educate the new apprentice. The artisan is giving away control of their time to help a fledgeling prospect, often without receiving adequate compensation. The bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm explains how one trains an apprentice:

The practical aspect of the education is all about being close to one another all the time. When we take in a student, it was a while ago when X got their journeyman papers [...] I as a supervisor have to be on the

floor and available 80% of the time for the student. There is not a lot of time for other work [...] Its not easy for small artisan workshops, who are often alone in their company, to take in an apprentice if they are not known beforehand through the family. Its a question of bringing in somebody new, betting it all on them, and then not getting anything in return. A few businesses have trouble with this, you have to be prepared to commit a lot of time. If you take on an apprentice who takes a lot of time in the beginning, then you might have to put stuff aside and do what brings in money to the business later in the day. You have to do that when the pupil has gone home.

As the cobbler states, many artisans have this pressure of control and economics when taking in apprentices. In fact, it's not uncommon for the artisans interviewed for this thesis to be unable to accommodate apprentices in their work shop for this reason.

Collective

This discussion of the negotiations of control within artisan labour is, however, also a discussion of collective endeavours within the trade. For even though artisans are giving up control in different ways to do their labour, they are also, at the same time, building on one another in order to pursue greater aspects of agency. It becomes not solely a question of repressive power, but enabling, transformative use of power.

The clearest example of the use of collective power in artisan labour comes in the form of the artisans drawing on the vast pool of skill the term *artisan* brings with it. The carpenter explains as follow when asked if there existed any cooperation between artisans:

More or less, we all know each other and meet with one another. I know a carpenter who mostly builds stairs, and when I get questions about stairs, I send them to him: because I do not want to build stairs. They take up space and are really heavy. It's not the hardest job, but I don't have the energy to lift all the stairs. If you are installing them in a house you have to lift the entire staircase up and build it on the spot. Besides him there is another guy who mainly does detailed work for buildings, mainly for those who build big apartments. It could be that they [building firms] need 3000 special doorsteps. He does those types of work. Then there is me, doing all the other weird jobs.

By allowing projects to be traded between each other, the carpenters of this part of Skåne are creating a space of mutual cooperation and skill-division. In other words, they are creating a collective force of carpentry, and through that force, enabling each other to work on favoured projects. Another example of this comes from the cobblers of Stockholm:

It's not just a cobbler's workshop, but you can also ask about everything here and get decent answers. A few customers come in and ask where they can find a drycleaner, because they know we will do our best to answer the question. We want all our artisan colleagues to thrive. I won't accept work if I can't do it well, especially if I know a colleague who can do it better. It's better to then say 'we are not the best at this, go to Bäckmans shoe-service. They are better with these things.' A few people think we are insane when we

recommend other cobblers, but I've solved the customer's problem then and there. If they go to Bäckmans, then we hope that they are treated well. They [Bäckmans] send customers to us as well, we try to be good colleagues.

Collective forces go further than just a division of labour however. They become the very soul of artisan work. The creator-customer relationship is a product of collective forces, conjoining together in order to create objects never before seen. The rattan-chair maker explains a collaboration she had with an artist's project:

When I was younger, we had a really fun project. We were working with an artist. He had his studio outside Williamsburg in New York, and the fax just churned out papers with his sketches: it was a really fun time. He was a very interesting person to get to know. He and dad became very close friends, and [they made] this giant [gestors a sphere], I think it was 12 meters across, it was hanging a while at Dunkers [an art gallery] in Helsingborg. It was an amazing time, and we test-hung Vildundens Hjärta [the name of the artwork] over at the Art Academy. It was fun, a core memory, you were young and it was all very cool.

Here, this collective interaction of creative forces created a material object, in this case an artwork, by the process of *collective* creation. It simply could not have existed without both parties willing it into being, building of each others abilities: both artistic and artisan.

Finally, through collective effort, the purpose of artisan labour is also morphed. For the father-daughter team of artisans, their collective power created the space necessary for their labour by way of a division of labour. But on a grander scale, through their collective endeavour, they also created a space of father and daughter bonding. This was what partly drove their efforts, their will to be closer to each other: and this effort was enabled by the specific form their labour took.

Collective endeavours value for artisan work can also be heard from the silversmith. She explains:

After a few years of education, I joined two friends in renting a workshop in a southern suburb. That's where I built my toolbox, and it became a real workshop. It was probably me who worked there the most, the others were there back and forth [...] I was alone out there the last four years. I didn't have any walk-in customers however, and it got quite lonely to sit there and work all by yourself.

The lack of colleagues, the lack of a collective sphere to change and challenge development, created loneliness for her, and for other artisans interviewed in this thesis. In that loneliness, it becomes much harder for artisan labour to have a purpose: at least outside the labour. Yet, the morphing ability of collective forces do not just limit themselves to the sphere of work. If we return to the silversmith, for her, her family outside artisan labour gave her purpose:

It's hard to completely shut down when you leave. Some days I can do it, but sometimes when you have a tough problem or a showcase: then it follows you a bit. But I have a family, I have grandkids: I have a lot

of other things as well. During spring and summer, I have a garden I keep. [Silversmithing] is not my entire life, and that feels pretty nice.

Seemingly, collective forces, taking the form of family, also enables her to find purpose outside her job, morphing the question of meaning in work to instead be about to what end that meaning affects other aspects of life.

FINDING MEANING TOGETHER

To return to the second question in this thesis, that being “how meaning in artisan labour is created collectively”, this thesis proposes that meaning in artisan labour could be constructed by viewing artisan production as a product of outside structures and forces.

To concretise this, and by looking towards the previously presented data, this paper proposes that the act of finding meaning in labour, in a relational manner, is created through the interaction between what could be called enabling structures and abstract forces. Enabling structures represents the structures of family, guilds and customers. Ostensibly, through them, artisan labour is enabled to exist by the structures they create. This process is “passive”, setting up the guidelines for the practical realisation of labour to be done. In other words, the way artisan exists as a vocation is informed and shaped by social structures outside the reflexive structure of artisan labour. Abstract forces, on the other hand, are forces of power like temporality or power-relations, shaping the very fabric of artisan labour through “active” interaction. In this simplified model, the abstract forces create the very guidelines that define structure. To use an example, the family as a structure, giving meaning and purpose to material aspects of labour, are shaped in their practical existence by forces of power and time. What the structure of the family is becomes a product of time embodied in social relations, power negotiated between actors etc. The family as a structure, however, does not, in turn, shape the forces of temporality and power.

At the same time however, what we call meaning, in this relational view, is not a product of power and collective force. Instead, through the interaction of enabling structures and the labour *itself*, through, for example, labour being done to satisfy customers, a grander meaning is created for the artisan. In other words, what meaning is possible is expanded by way of structural emancipation of what constitutes meaning. Enabling structures, at least for this study’s artisans, expand the very realms the creation of meaning can take.

It is this process that could be called “meaning in relation. A visualisation of this, called figure 3, is presented on the next page:

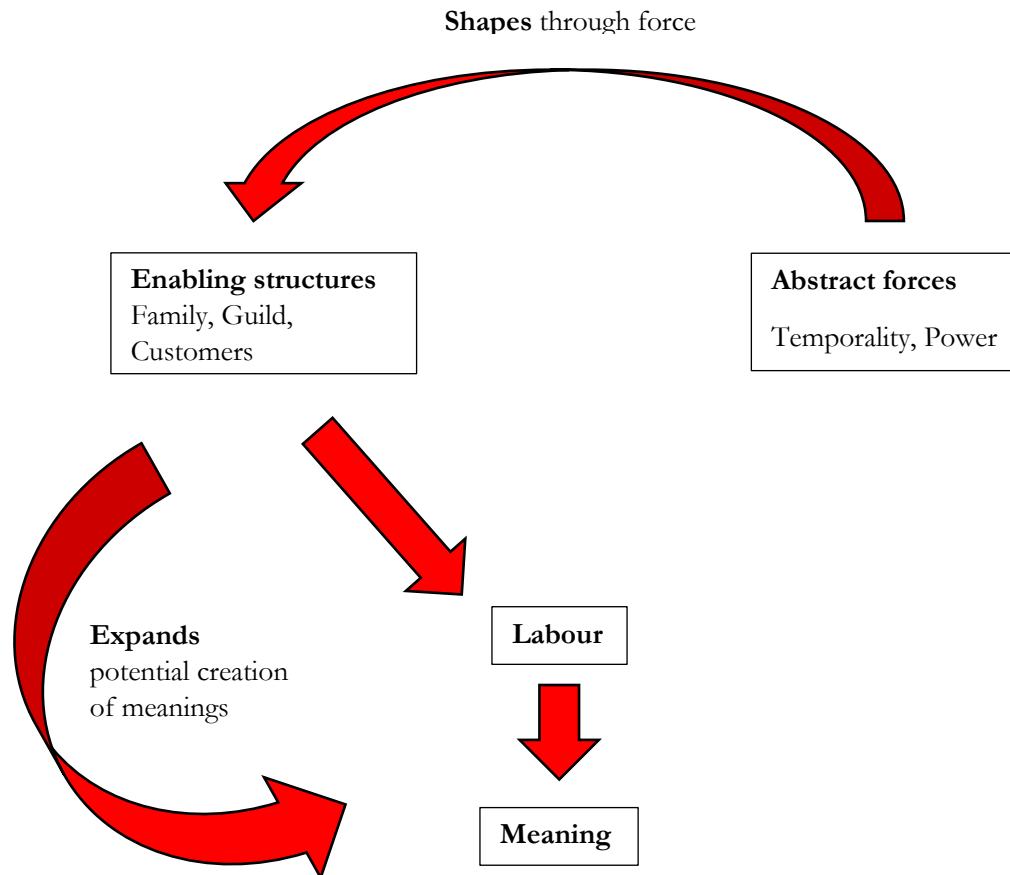


Figure 3. The creation of meaning in relation

Deductive analysis

What is then presented in this inductive model is quite simple from a theoretical perspective: it presents collective forces coalescing in order to create relational views on value and meaning. Applying the Marxian view of production as a creation of both material goods *and* social relations (Turner, 2008:44), this segment can begin to suggest that the process of artisan production is only possible in its expanded sense through the passive and active interplay of social structures and forces in its make-up. The practical realities of artisan labour, and the meaning found within, exists only because collective forces enable it to be. Whilst production could exist in a limited sense without these relational aspects, its true life, its true animation, its *raison d'être*, comes as a product of social actions.

To go further, the result of this dialectic of production is product, or, put differently, value. Value here is created both in a semiotic way, where value is understood in its symbolism for the artisans, or in a tangible way; where objects have concrete uses and purposes that become valuable (Kalb, 2022). The cobblers create shoes to both be used orthopedically and as products of status: imbued with both semiotic markers of labour-time *and* purely utilitarian values; and commonly,

markers that represent both aspects (Munn, 1986). Regardless, through collective forces imbuing the product with meaning, the process of its production is given meaning. The reason for the very shoes being made is also product of social forces.

From this socialised production of value comes a socialised production of values and meaning. Assuming that value-production creates social values (Graeber, 2001), then the reason for its production, meaning, could also be a question of collective valuation. In this, taking a relational view on artisan labour also becomes a process of understanding agency within artisan labour in their creation of meaning. If artisan labour is a product of collective relations, then it must also be affected by the artisan themselves as social actors. Value production might then be the thing enabling this agency, as the things humans produce are, at the same time, replicators and drivers of social values; and in turn, drivers of values and meaning. By being masters of value production, by being the endpoint of their social production-cycle, artisan perhaps change the social systems they interact with just as much as said system sets the groundwork for them.

Finally, if value is the representation of collective views (Graeber, 2013), then meaning, the reason for values creation, becomes a product of collective forces. Creators and customers collectively negotiate what has value, what has meaning, in their relationship. Family and guilds legitimize certain forms of value-production through its framework of collective meaning. What becomes meaningful then also becomes a product of social structure. Collectivised meaning could furthermore come to expand what meaning actually becomes. Collectivised meaning could allow artisans to find meaning outside merely production. *Working for* family, *working for* tradition: these become forces that propel meaning outside its own immediate future. Just as Makovicky (2020:317) writes of craft having its greatest merit when it took the form of collective value-transformation, so to could meaning be seen as having its greatest form when done in a collective sphere.

However, one could equally view this process as an interaction of subjectification. The social structures and dynamic of artisan labour contains and creates freedoms enabling labour, creating a reflexive view of meaning *by way of* collective forces. Meaning could equally be a solitary endeavour, even in this more pluralistic view on labour forces. The question then becomes if artisan labour *in relation* isn't instead an extended view of how meaning is constructed reflexively: with social relations serving as the springboard rather than the steering wheel (McGushin, 2010:135) Exploring this thought further, one can also question if this relational force becomes as important an agent as an artisans material entanglement is for their creation of self. Whilst social forces could create the groundwork from which artisans gets access to, or contextualise,

their labour, are the material aspect of repeated tacit practice a greater agent of change? Put differently, is the process of material engagement not, by way of being *responsive* to artisan engagement, a greater force in creating meaning: as it forms a conversation, a dialectic, between artisan and object; instead of a grey-eminence giving orders in the background?

The demi-regularity of Collective Creation

With both the inductive and deductive analyses in mind, the question of “how is meaning in artisan labour created collectively” should perhaps be rephrased to instead ask “how is meaning *expanded* in artisan labour collectively”?

Seemingly, what becomes clear from the inductive analysis is that, while collective forces could produce meaning on their own, their main strength, and indeed their true relevancy, lies in their potentiality to create an expanded avenue for the *contextualisation* of meaning. By being able to expand precisely what meanings are possible through the integration of a plurality of social voices, collective forces liberate the artisan from simply finding meaning in solely their own work; enabling them to also find meaning *outside* the solitary reaction that is the reflexive creation of meaning presented earlier. In this, what meaning is created therefore becomes a question of what meanings is defined between a plurality of actors, and in that, this paper suggests that meaning in artisan work is created collectively through negotiation.

The question then again becomes one of agency, and here, in this negotiation, a further example of artisans being active agents is seen within their own creation of meaning. The only key difference to the reflexive agency of artisan labour is that within the collective sphere, this agency becomes much more tenuous, as it relates to negotiations of action outside the artisans main skillset. Instead, this negotiation takes the form of social dynamics needing to be changed. This skillset, whilst learned tacitly over a lifetime, does not conjure the same assurance as its physical sibling.

Furthermore, from the deductive analysis, one comes to wonder yet again if meaning created in a collective sense comes from a process of mutual creation or subjugation. Put differently, is the meaning in artisan relations something chosen by the artisan themselves in concord with social forces, or merely an acceptance of said forces. Artisans, through social structures, can pick and choose what meaning there is to be had from the relationship; yet equally, they have absolutely no choice in the matter, with what constitutes collective values having already been decided for them by the people around them. It once again becomes a question of agency, and in this, becomes a question of the role of a singular actor within a collective network. What meaning

that then is created becomes a theoretical question of what freedom an actor, an artisan, has in their life. In this, if meaning becomes a process of negotiation, then that at least assumes some form of agency in this struggle. To that end, the question once again becomes a division between blissful submission and collective creation, requiring the personal optimism of the beholder to orient which is which.

8 THE CREATION OF MEANING

Combining the view from both previous chapters, of meaning in artisan labour being either a product of reflexive or collective action; what could exist in the interplay of both aspects? Is meaning for artisans perhaps formed in the interaction between reflexive and social interactions? Let's return to the artisans and this paper's two figures for answer.

In figure 3, even though abstract forces create enabling structures, and even though these enabling structures in turn create an expanded sense of meaning: these social factors still have to interact with a reflexive, and highly material, nucleus called labour. In other words, there exists a reflexive core to all collective interactions of labour where collective forces are made manifest. Returning to the carpenter and his statement about veneer, this interaction was highlighted when asked what brought him most joy in his labour:

It's the thing when you get to work with traditional material in an old way. People who appreciate old handcraft, not just wanting you to throw something together. People who say "wow, you can build furniture with veneer". Veneer in particular has received a bad reputation because of how many types of modern furniture use it, often badly made. I love veneer, you could do fantastic things with it. All veneer is cut out of the same piece of wood, and are exactly the same height. If you have a piece of wood that is very beautiful, or potentially beautiful, you can do incredible nice-looking pieces of furniture without wasting expensive material. You can still have solid wood in it, because when people think about veneer they think about IKEA: s paper-constructions or all the 1950's doors that you can just fall through. I like to work with veneer, it's a very satisfying thing to work with something you can use to make beautiful things. When it is done people think it's gorgeous, but when you first suggest it, they think 'no, I don't think that will work'.

There is a lot to unpack in this statement, but one can begin by stating that in the veneer, the laminated sheets of wood, a connection appears between reflexive value creation and collective relations.

In transforming the wood, taking a piece of larger wood and expanding its use-potential by creating multiple sheets of veneer, something of varied value was done. Skill has been exerted on a physical object, the carpenter has enabled something "beautiful" to be created, all because of a dialectic between creator and object. Yet, at the same time, this value is only truly realized when presented to a customer: an outside relation. By proving that veneer is, in fact, not just a budget material used by low-cost flatpack furniture stores, a new valuation of the product is made.

Through this new valuation, new meaning has been created: both in the act of producing the material, as it becomes seen as "worthwhile", and in the product itself; as it is heightened from a

cheap material into a “economical” material. Another example of reflexive labour acting as a conduit for collective valuation comes from the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm:

There is this big fair for the entirety of Europe every three years down in Wiesbaden, and it’s for the whole shoe-business. There you can compete in different competitions: orthopaedics, reparation, male and female shoes. However, you are not crowned as the best: it’s the shoes that are crowned. There can be multiple gold medals, every pair of shoes receives a judgement. I have not got a gold medal, but I have won both silver and bronze. That’s because I want to be judged from other shoemakers, and receive feedback from what they think about the things you have done.

Although the shoes are crowned as the winners in themselves, although meaning is seemingly derived from the act of production: the shoes are only able to be given meaning through collective judgement. What meaning the shoes have then seemingly become a product of both spheres of relation, working in tandem to create a deeper sense of meaning.

Furthermore, the process of labour seemingly becomes an embodying force, inserting both external power and internal motivations within it. By interacting physically with objects, changing the way they look and act, artisans are also imbuing them with forces outside the reflexive process of production. Returning to the carpenter’s story of veneer again, the act of “saving” a historical production process means one has to understand that the product *has* a history to save, a force giving it meaning through an understanding of temporality. It means understanding that something is historic, and that is done by working with a product that has changed over time, both in physical qualities and in production methods. It means reflexively coming to understand the social project of time through engaging with “old” methods, imbuing new objects with the same “historical” temporality, the same assumed “oldness”, through the process of labour.

Another example of this could come from the bespoke shoemaker and cobbler from Stockholm:

When you are an artisan, you have a feeling. The reason why everything hangs around here [gestures to the rows and rows of old shoes hanging from the wall], all these old shoes. Somebody has made these, with the competency that entails. They can’t just be thrown, because that’s not valuing the skill that has been used for them. Nowadays, we might think that the red high-heels hanging up there are completely mad, and that you can’t walk in them. But somebody has design them, and back then they were groundbreaking, and the person managed to sell things people couldn’t believe. It’s a time capsule that people have been able to achieve things that should be impossible, and still manage good business [...] I would be very sad if these boots [points to some boots], which I have put down a week of work on, won’t be used later: that would be terrible. If what we are doing, which I believe in, would not be appreciated.

The force of collective endeavours could be seen here, being embodied in the shoes as a product of creation by the cobbler, and an object of admiration from the customer. The boots, as an

object, receive collective meaning through the process of labouring on them. For artisans, the process of physical manipulation *and* structural integration, the process of production, becomes the engine from which product is created in both a tangible and semiotic way.

What is seen here then is reflexive acts *and* social structures interacting in order to create the act of labour. Returning to figure 2, from production, from the act of artisans interacting with the physical world, the act of creation can occur. In a sense, something new becomes created by the natural world being changed. Yet in that model, this paper proposed that passion was one of the main driving forces of this engine of creation, enabling artisans to tinker and task day in and day out by its propulsion. However, if a structural analysis is integrated, this view can be expanded. When asked what is the most difficult part of her job, the rattan-chair maker said this:

Maybe the worry, even though you probably shouldn't even have it. Worrying about the future. You want the store to remain, and that somebody will take it over eventually. Learn the trade, and preferably remain [...] Then it's the question of material. If there's an attack in the Red Sea, I immediately think 'oh no, the rattan!'

It's not just passion that drives artisans forward, but also the enabling structures proposed in figure 3. Family, guilds and customers propel artisans to also produce. These need not necessarily be structures that enable solely from positive reinforcement, as just as they support artisans in their production, they could equally "force" an artisan to produce out of obligation to maintain the structures. Regardless, they become structures that drive forward the act of creation nonetheless. Furthermore, to simplify a bit, passion could then also be called an enabling structure (although one has to remember that passion is not necessarily a collective enterprise, as it's a product of very personalized circumstances). Seemingly, these enabling structures become propellers of creation: enabling the creation of things by way of motivation and obligation, acting as oils to the wheels of labours actual manifestation.

Finally, continuing with the structure laid out by figure 2, one can see that through creation, meaning is created for artisan labour. However, as was explored in figure 3, through enabling structures, multiple avenues for meaning could be had. This could be seen by returning to the rattan-chair maker. I had asked her what she loves most about the job, and she responded:

It's the thing that you have actually made something, and when the customer picks it up, you get satisfied. You are happy with the work; the customer gets damned happy. I think that's a very fun part of it all. It's also building the furniture as well, definitely.

This quote quite beautifully illustrates the creation of meaning in artisan labour. By the process of reflexive production, meaning is created for her in the act of building furniture. Simply

“making something” creates satisfaction. However, apart from that, there is meaning created in the interaction with customers as well. By seeing a happy customer, she receives satisfaction and purpose. What meaning is enabled to be had is then expanded from simply a product of reflexive interaction. By labour being done in service for others, it expands the valuation of that labour to many different actors and structures with different contextualisation’s of meaning, enabling different types of meaning to be the product of labour.

What broadened view of meaning is created in the interaction between individual and collective expressions of labour? This thesis proposes that within artisan labour, when combining both a reflexive and a collective view on the creation of meaning, a pluralization of what meaning is to be had happens. What this means for the creation of meaning in artisan labour is this: instead of thinking of one, concrete form of meaning being created from artisan labour, one should instead think of many *meanings* being done in a dialectic between individual and relational forms of meaning-creation. Production could give purpose and meanings when done for its own purpose, but relational structures and forces give *further* meaning to its existence. Meaning in artisan labour therefore becomes a product of productive systems *and* social relations. A visualisation of this process is presented on the next page (figure 4)

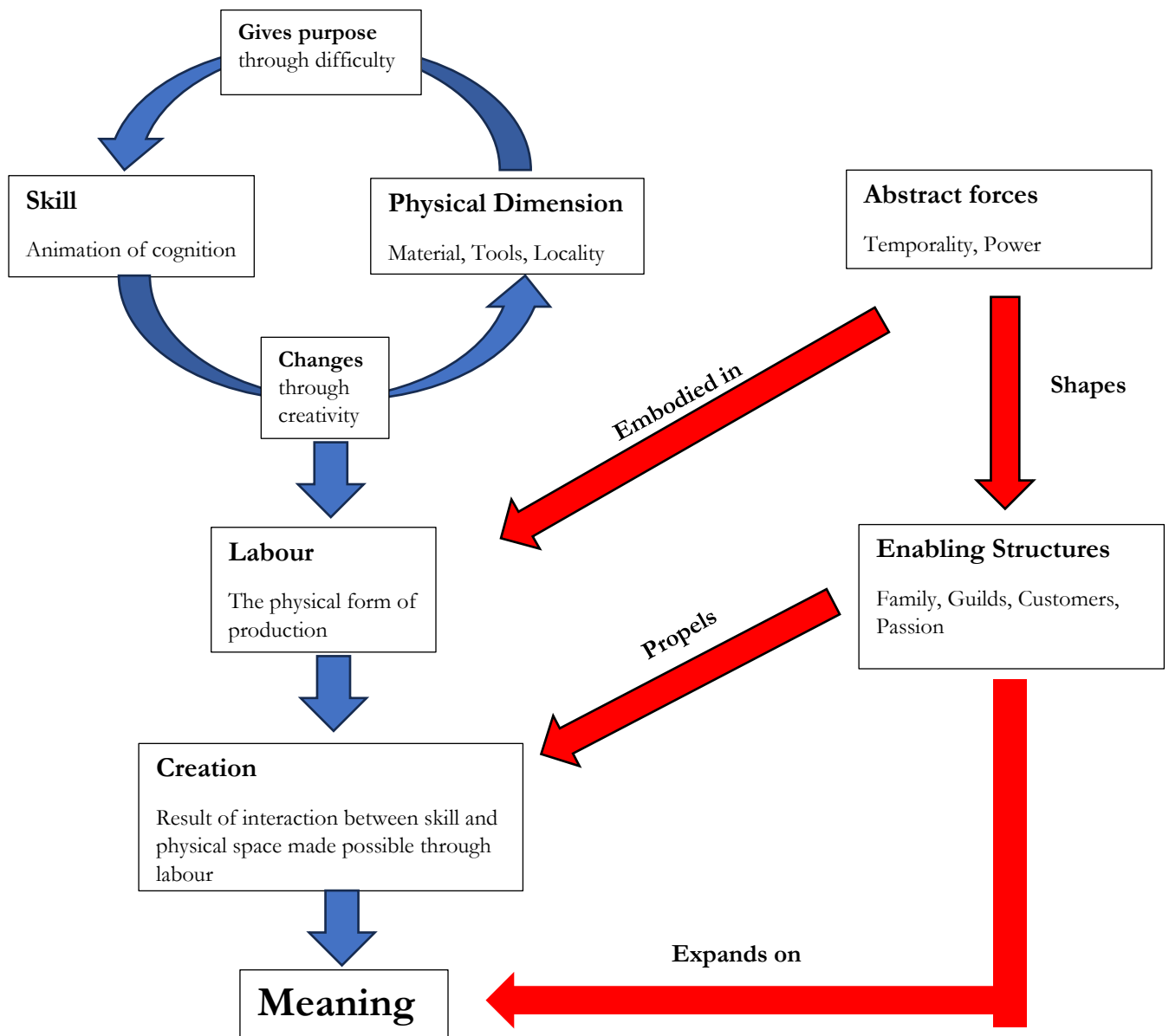


Figure 4

Deductive Meaning

With this final, inductive analysis of artisan labour, how does this figure interact with the previous discussed theoretical understanding of the creation of meaning; and, in turn, what new avenues for exploration does this simplistic understanding of labour give for said figures in return?

Returning to the first point of interaction between figurers, of labour being the physical manifestation of materiality and cognition, whilst also being the place were shaping forces like power-relations and temporality are embodied in material, a few different views appear.

Using the Foucauldian perspective presented earlier (Faubion & Rabinow, 2000), this point, the act of labour, becomes the moment the subjectification of artisan labour occurs. The act of embodiment becomes the act of subjugating oneself to external powers, imbuing persons and the products they make with both positive and negative forces. This is seemingly done then within the process of labour, and is done unavoidably. The Foucauldian theory of subjectification could potentially be of use here as an explanation for *why* power is embodied in labour, not just *that* it is. Taking it a step further, it is in their labour that artisans can monitor and improve their beings through the active response from material objects. The act of labour therefore becomes an important step in being able to create the beforementioned “practices of self”: as in the very literal sense of creating an object, they are also creating “an object” of themselves, imbued with the powers and reasons of society, to conform themselves to (Foucault, 1988). Meaning in the reflexive sense then becomes a matter of embodying external ideas into a wholly *original* process.

However, the question then becomes if the model presented here, of labour being an embodiment of power, is not instead a presentation of collective forces becoming present in individual production. If production is both the creation of material goods and social relations (Turner, 2008:44), then perhaps this becomes the moment said material good and social relations interact. This is perhaps the moment material products and goods are made social and comparative: through the act of labour. Furthermore, this might also be the point of when Munn’s (1986) qualisigns are incorporated into product: symbols of, for example, temporality becoming manifest through the manipulation of objects; through the process of labour. Meaning in a relational sense here becomes embodying social relations into material goods.

Yet, both these theoretical grounds share common ground, as both present the process of labour being the moment social relations are made manifest. A reflexive stance means embodying collective relations to the same degree a collective stance means creating reflexive production. The real question of difference perhaps comes if one looks at the process of creation as a product of labour being done for itself and simultaneous propelled by other means.

This question becomes one of animation: how long can one create thanks to different reasons *for* creating. Taking a hardline reflexive stance, the process of creation must be done solely for itself: all other propellers become trivial. For if creation is a matter of entanglement with product and self, being the force that creates meaning, then it must be done in order to maintain that self: and not just for social or economic reasons. The process of shaping the world, of the dialectic of person and thing, does not, in this case, need social and economic reasons for the act of creation,

as the act in itself becomes sufficient in creating meaning. What meaning is made for artisan then becomes a question of what meaning is allowed to create the system replicating this process of reflexive creation.

However, if returning to the idea of their existing *meanings* in plural, one can explore how there can both exist this dominating expression of meaning from creation *and* meanings outside of creation. For this, one must assume that artisans cannot act in total all the time, and act differently depending on different circumstances. In this, enabling structures become alternate modes of action for artisans, giving them possibility to create for themselves as well as creating for economic reasons, social reasons: even private reasons. What becomes of this is a collectivisation of creation, moving it from totality into plurality by reason of dynamic propulsion. The effect of this becomes simple: artisan labour is given many different modes of meaning, all highly dependent on the artisan's individual relation to the world. The reason for the creation of artisan production then also becomes a question of existing *for* others. The family business, for example, perhaps exists solely for the reason of family: not because one finds fulfilment in creation.

In the end, both these ends of the spectrum of creation serve to answer us *why* meaning is created in artisan work. For its own sake, or for the sake of collective creation, meaning seems to be the end-product for both views. The reason for this is quite simple: the act wouldn't exist without a reason for it existing. If something is not observable, or in greater terms, does not exist: then it simply does not exist. One must therefore also accept that artisan labour can have a great many of meanings: both reflexively and in relation. The meaning of artisan labour perhaps is in its own creation, or in placing that creation in a larger context. Regardless, both could exist at the same time, serving the same purpose: giving propulsion to the entirety of artisan labour.

RETRODUCTION OF GENERATIVE MECHANISM

Returning to this paper's general question of "How is meaning created in artisan labour?", this paper proposes a few key thoughts concerning the combination of both reflexive and collective analysis.

Firstly, in some aspects, meaning within artisan labour is a product of reflexive construction. Through continuous interaction with productive systems and material, artisans are able to construct a sense of purpose and meaning. Silently, without uttering a word, the material dialectic between artisans and the material world forms a purpose only evident over years of creation.

However, even at its most reflexive point, this creation of meaning is not something that is solely in the control of its creators. Meaning in artisan labour is also equally a product of collective negotiation, affecting the very structure of its production and the very valuation of what meaning is constructed. What meaning is to be had and valued is something that is negotiated outside the control of artisan labour. Furthermore, through an expansion of meaning by way of collective forces, meaning could be found for artisans outside the reflexive interaction of labour. Social forces and social relations therefore become paramount in producing meaning in artisan labour.

Nevertheless, the creation of meaning within artisan labour is not fatalistic, and this social negotiation of meaning is not, however, entirely definitive. The integration of collective structures in work only happens *through* individual understanding and actions of labour; through the artisans themselves creating their labour reality by way of their own hands and their own thoughts. Labour, the process of creating, becomes the process of reflexively engaging with collective notions of meaning, imbuing product and work with social value through individual action. It becomes the moment when artisans can negotiate on their own terms with collective notions through their skills of physical transformation. It becomes the moment material mastery could be translated into social change, as artisans have a physical say in how their labour is done; and in that, how their labour interacts with social forces. In this, agency is afforded for artisans insofar as they become the creators of the very system they inhabit.

For just as an artisan creates something from the material world, they are also creating meaning within the social sphere through both their reflexive and collective interactions. Artisans become drivers for what they want their labour to be, by in large because their labour is so entirely defined by the artisan's own personalities themselves; as well as their mastery of production. An artisan workshop cannot exist without the artisan inhabiting them, and an artisan labour system cannot exist without people giving it their all; actively creating meaning as the very point of their labour. Simultaneously, an artisan is afforded independence *because* they are skilled, because they possess a unique talent that others simply do not have that capitalism as a productive system cannot hope to replicate. They have the ability to integrate their own sense of meaning in the product they create, embodying all that they make with a sense of personhood. Artisan are embodying the qualisigns of meaning (Munn 1986) as the main product of their labour. In an alienated world, where levels of increasing abstraction in production remove us from the people actually making the stuff we humans use every day (Carrier, 2020), this talent truly becomes unique. The labour of artisans then also becomes a giving institution, sharing meaning in the products they make to the consumers who buy them.

9 A REST ON THE WORKMAN'S STOOL

Finally, then, how is then meaning created in artisan labour? As written before, this thesis suggests that the answer to the question of “how meaning is created in artisan labour” is a matter of seeing artisan labour both as a product of the artisan own creation *and* a collective will; enabling its continued existence in the modern day. Meaning is created in the reflexive relationship between artisan and material relations, giving purpose through interaction and reaction in production. Yet, equally, *how* that meaning is categorized, how meanings is given its dynamic state, should instead be seen as a process of collective engagement by way of constant negotiations by artisan and outside actors. These two forces both work in conjunction to create meaning, and come together *through* the practice of labour. For as the rattan-chair maker so eloquently put it, artisan labour “*becomes something*”. It creates, transforming both man and material into forms untold, through engagements of both person and structure. The people who come to become artisans are, in a very real way, forever changed as a person by their entry into their respective trades; as is the systems that interact with the labour.

From this relation, this thesis can then speculate that meaning in artisan labour becomes created from the artisans themselves as the point to their labour, through the interaction of both reflexive and collective forces. Artisan labour, in its specific qualities, is made to exist *because* it produces meaning for the people who work within it and for outside actors. More precisely, artisan labour is created both for the artisans themselves, enabling a direction and interaction in their lives, and for everybody else; enabling other social actors to share the creation of meaning. This sharing of meaning could also then become the way artisan labour survives both economically and socially. To summarize then, the creation of meaning within artisan labour becomes a product of both reflexive practices and collective negotiations, working together to create meaning within artisan labour. From this creation of meaning, artisan labour is both given a purpose and a use for the artisans themselves, as well as for outside actors.

Apart from this answer however, the deconstruction of artisan labour done in this thesis represents, in its most basic elements, a framework for how one can come to study meaning in labour: as a study of unique relationships creating shared universes. In this specific question however, of how meaning within work is formed in artisan labour, some key questions remain that were unable to be explored for various reasons. Firstly, this study of artisan labour was mainly a study of masters; of the very people in absolute control of their labour. In a further deconstruction of artisan labour, two social groups, for two different reasons, would come to represent an interesting dynamic: that of apprentices and customers.

Apprentices become interesting, for through them, one can understand the process of entry into the arena of artisan labour. More than that, however, apprentices might offer an interesting avenue for study in how they come to represent workers who are not skilled, and do not have mastery over their craft. In this, one can begin to question how a person is drawn to a field where they are challenged, and, at the same time, discover how meaning could change over time; just as how values might change over time as Ros, Schwartz and Surkiss (1999) proposed. It might be the case that meaning is a state of constant renegotiation. The second group, customers, might prove to be an interesting set of interlocutors in regards to the transfer of meaning proposed earlier in this thesis. If artisan work, as a structure, acts as a mechanism that enables the transfer of meaning through objects, then understanding how the recipients of this trade, the customers, come to understand and integrate this relationship might prove very illuminating.

Furthermore, artisan labour might be the most extreme case of finding meaning in one's work, but it is hardly the only vocation to have passionate people working within it. To say that a sanitation worker or doctor cannot find meaning because of specific mechanical hindrances would be short-sighted and fatalistic. Meaning in work is not something exclusive for the privileged few, and, as was proposed in this thesis, meaning in work should instead be seen as a construct of contextualisation, collective negotiation and personhood; structures, while visibly highlighted in artisan work, that exists in various forms in all professions. An interesting area of study might then be the study of how meaning is formed in environments *hostile* to its creation, and from that, explore in comparison to artisan labour how meaning is formed in general within labour.

Finally, if nothing else, the study of artisan work, and its relation to the creation of meaning, offers an opportunity to reflect on what role meaning has in one owns working life. Is it the prime mover of everything one does, as Kirkegaard (2000) and Frankl (1985) suggests, or does work simply become an enabler for other avenues of exploration as suggested by Pratt and Ashforth (2003)? Is the creation of meaning, as a product of humans labouring through work, the very creation of the material world (Heidegger, 2010)? If meaning is lacking in work, why is it lacking: what structures and routines exist that prevent its formation? If meaning does exist, why does it exist: and what does it enable? For artisans, labour becomes the avenue from which many wonders are enabled. Perhaps, by engaging with meaning in work directly, creations of wonder are possible for us all, both reflexively and collectively. Perhaps they are already done, just unnoticed. All that this thesis proposes is, in the end, is that we should look a little bit closer at what it means to have meaning.

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