**The value of Craft**

What connects the last two scissor-makers in Sheffield, a student combining practical and digital skills to create new sustainable products, an unemployed 17 year old learning cabinet-making to up-cycle furniture, a young Birmingham women making jewellery reflecting her experience of migration, members of a Transition Town sewing at a re-skilling event and a group of friends gathering for years to knit and talk?

Craft ranges from traditional to cutting-edge practice, uses materials from textiles to ceramics and produces products from small domestic items to architectural structures. Today craft practice is often invisible and simultaneously ubiquitous – it’s place in a more sustainable future is both intangible and intensely practical.

In a world dominated by mass production and consumption, craft engages us with material, form and function. Wider acquisition and practice of haptic skills and an understanding and appreciation of materials could help challenge over-consumption, the experience of making a wooden box or a clay pot awaken a different sense of an object’s *value*. Projects such as Gareth Neale’s [Zero Carbon Furniture](http://garethneal.co.uk/ipocn-the-journey) or work produced from fallen or forgotten timber by [Wycliffe Stutchbury](http://www.wycliffestutchbury.co.uk/) help test and challenge our use, and abuse, of finite reserves of energy and other resources.

Engaging with traditional craft and local materials engenders a deeper sense of place and heritage. Often our towns and cities are where and how they are *because* of craft based industries using local resources eg Sheffield cutlery and Stoke pottery. Engaging directly with materials can help rebuild connections to the natural world and challenge our loss of affinity to nature (‘Nature deficit disorder’ - [Louv, Richard](http://richardlouv.com/) – Last Child in the Woods 2008)

Craft can also help widen our temporal frame – identified by the Long Now Foundation as an antidote to today’s faster/cheaper mind set. In ‘[A Beautiful Thing’](http://www.tippingpoint.org.uk/commissions/a-beautiful-thing/), artist Barnaby Stone takes an ancient oak beam, hand hewn four centuries ago during a famine. Its history is known and supposed. But what is its future?

Craft is at the heart of Transition Town’s ‘[Great Re-Skilling’](https://www.transitionnetwork.org/ingredients/deepening/great-reskilling). Learning making and repairing skills helps make individuals and communities more resilient. Meanwhile in [Craft and Wellbeing](http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/content/files/craft_and_wellbeing.pdf) (Crafts Council - Yair 2011) identifies that craft practice can provide ‘a balanced approach to life and work which promotes all-round wellbeing. It can ... alleviate the symptoms of physical and mental disorders and stress, and help people to build strong relationships with the people around them.’ The process of making engeders what Mihalyi Csíkszentmihályi describes as [*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*](https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow?language=en). People are happiest when they are in a state of *flow*— a state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity at hand.

Craft holds at its core an imaginative leap of faith. The apprentice imagines himself as a future master, and with that positive vision takes the long slow journey towards his goal. The price is worth paying, and the journey sustained, by the imagined future. Individual craft makers embody the journey we need to make collectively to a life sustaining society - and the positive vision which must lie at its core.

‘*The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destinations*.’ John Scharr (Hempel, 1996)

*This piece from 2014 by Hilary Jennings appears in abridged form in* [*Playing for Time*](http://oberonbooks.com/playing-for-time) *– Making Art as if the World Mattered – by Lucy Neal*